

**Exploring young people's views and experiences of relationship
abuse: and the role of education in framing this perspective.**

**Submitted by Sarah Elizabeth Cole to the University of Exeter
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Abstract

This thesis investigates young women's experiences of domestic violence and abuse within teenage heterosexual relationships and the role of education in understanding these experiences. Domestic violence and abuse has often been defined and located as an adult issue. However, there is increasing awareness that young people experience greater levels of violence and abuse in their relationships, from as young as thirteen (Barter et al 2009); with comparable deleterious effects as for older women. This research focuses on young women (all under the age of nineteen) who were at school when they experienced violence and abuse in their romantic relationships. The research utilises a theoretical framework which draws on insights from feminist post-structural approaches to gender and sexuality. It does so in order to explore the discourses available to young women with which to make sense of their experience of relationships in a context of violence and abuse. It also seeks to explore the young women's experience of education, both formal and informal; the role it played, and the role it could have played.

There is a dearth of empirical research that has explored, in depth, young women's experiences of violence and abuse, and subsequently, little is known about the ways in which they understand and make sense of their experiences. This research adopted a feminist narrative approach to the interviewing in order to allow the young women participating in the research to give voice to their experiences of violence and abuse in the context of their education. The discourses the young women drew on in order to narrate and explain their experiences reflect dominant heteronormative discourses of love. Their 'stories' were supported by narratives which were infused by popular culture – these were hierarchically gendered in nature and appeared to perpetuate inequality in a way which simultaneously allowed violence and abuse to remain hidden amongst dominant 'practices of love' (Donovan & Hester, 2015). From my analysis this included experiences of pregnancy and motherhood which were weaponised and bound up with gendered power relationships and complex experiences of love.

The research presented here will argue that these young women's narratives were at times incoherent, as they worked to find ways to understand their

experiences in an apparently limited and confining heteronormative framework. This 'identity work' is recognised as part of their attempts to reproduce, resist and rupture discourse, and goes some way in explaining the contradictory and fragmentary nature of these stories. A particularly pertinent focus of the research was the focus on education, and the fact that these young women's experiences were explored within their broader educational context (and both in terms of informal and formal educational arrangements). This educational exploration was also important because of the means in which it has allowed for an understanding of the ways education has frustrated their understandings rather than used as a space to challenge their experiences and disrupt confining discourses, however, it also highlighted the ways in which education might be able to transform young people's experiences, understandings and their constructions of relationships.

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"Love is a combination of care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, respect and trust." (bell hooks)

Sarah Cole 17th September 2018

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Exploring young people's views and experiences of relationship abuse: and the role of education in framing this perspective.

Chapter one: Introduction

This thesis reports on an exploration of young women's situated experiences and understandings of violence and abuse in their own relationships and examines the role of education: its limitations and its possibilities. This qualitative small-scale study looks at the experiences of domestic violence in an area of South West England through in-depth interviews with seven young women whilst at school, who had subsequently accessed support services as survivors/victims of domestic violence. The research seeks to examine their views and experiences through 'gendered', and 'sexualised' lenses whilst problematizing education as simultaneously providing a 'conducive context' (Kelly, 1988) in which gender violence can flourish, but also as the solution by which to transform and prevent the global 'pandemic' of gender violence: with a specific focus on domestic violence and abuse.

In this introduction I start by providing an overview of the context in which to situate the complex factors underpinning my research, including the intersecting of my personal and professional journey. I provide an outline to set out the rationale for the research by examining the significance of investigating domestic violence and specifically with young people and set out the boundaries and limits of my study. I move on to consider the definitions and terminology that I employ and how these connect with broader concepts in this field. I examine a range of factors that impact on young people, including: gender, age, age gap, first relationships, pregnancy, peer and family violence, to emphasise and underpin the need to focus on young people's experiences. I then examine educational policy before I conclude this introductory chapter by drawing together the rationale and broad aims and present my research questions followed by an outline of the subsequent thesis chapters.

The context of my research:

In 2009 my thesis proposal was to research the policy implementation of placing PSHE as a statutory requirement in state schools and teaching issues relating to VAWG (Violence Against Women and Girls). However, with a change of government in 2010 the political landscape changed, and one such change

affected the implementation of the policy at the heart of my proposal. The policy simply vanished. This became the first stage of a contradictory position of rhetoric and action, of insistent and persistent calls from many areas of society including parents, young people (Ellis, 2005, 2006; Stanley et al 2010; Stanley & Humphreys, 2015; Ellis & Thiara, 2014), educationalists and policy makers for education to address issues of teen relationships. This was framed by the moral panic and debate over the impact of the sexualisation of young girls (Bailey, 2011; Buckingham et al., 2009; Papadopoulos, 2010), child sexual exploitation (as seen in the Rotherham case: (Jay, 2014), and increasing awareness of the use of new technologies as a form of abuse (for example, 'sexting' (Barter et al, 2015) and so-called 'revenge porn' (Bates, 2016). This was contextualised within a climate of social and cultural tensions, a time of economic decline and austerity (Durbin, Page & Walby, 2016), all of which had a huge impact on women, with women's services taking the brunt and heavily impacting on domestic violence and abuse provision.

I was surprised by the disappearance of the policy, given the urgent cultural context and the previous apparent political commitment to a VAWG strategy. To keep pace with the socio-political impact on my research I [re]framed my research questions by applying a wider lens to examine the broader question of young people's views and experiences of relationships and abuse and the existing and possible roles of education. I designed a two-phase project. The early phase of the research, a pilot phase, was framed as 'exploratory' in which concepts relating to young people, relationships, abuse and education were problematized. The second phase was to be an ethnographic exploration of young people's views and experiences of their own relationships and abuse within a school setting, specifically education on healthy relationships. The early phase was to be undertaken with young women who had experienced domestic violence and abuse in their own relationships whilst at school and had sought support from a domestic violence support service. This strategy embodied my ethical approach: I wanted to access only participants who had received specialist support for the abuse they had experienced. My aim in this was to minimise [re]traumatisation, and for the young women to have had time to start the process of recovery; to process, and to reflect on their experiences, with support to reframe and make sense of these experiences. Ethically I felt this

was imperative, although I was aware that it may pose limits to the research. This phase of the research was intended to provide contextual information, to address ways of discussing the issues within this age group in an educational context, in a consultancy style approach (Etherington, 2004). My aims were to examine themes relating to their experiences of domestic violence and abuse and the role that education, in its broadest sense, had, or could have had in their experiences.

Access...Access...Access....

Initial access for the first part of my research was aided by my work context. The organisation and team I worked with at the time fully supported my research endeavours. I was pleased to already occupy an informed 'insider position', but also aware of the need to balance the juxtaposition of being an outsider, maintaining a 'curious' position. My existing knowledge and assumptions about gender violence would inevitably inform my understanding of the data I would collect. I was also aware of the potential for the organisation to hijack the research as a method of meeting their needs. That said, the age group I was interested in in relation to my research was not one that accessed services in large numbers, however, it was growing due to the service provision having been contracted to include teen girls based on the evidence from the NSPCC study. Therefore, the process of identifying young women and asking them to participate was a long route, but ethically I felt that it was an essential strategy. At this point I undertook two interviews with young women who were working with the DVA services. The young women had been given an 'invitation' to take part in my research (see appendix 1).

The second phase of the research was to be ethnographic. It was planned that this would take place within two school settings, and that it would utilise a gendered lens through which I would examine the delivery of healthy relationships programmes. The first part of this process was to contact schools in order to seek access and support for the project. This process was also rather protracted. I contacted several schools and discussed my research and asked if they would be willing to participate. They were not. I then approached a school on the advice that it was very proactive in the area of 'healthy relationship's' and had a progressive PSHE team, regularly inviting a domestic violence charity to facilitate sessions. They agreed to discuss my research and I

met with a warm enthusiastic head of PSHE who was very keen on teaching “real life skills” who was equally disappointed at the disappearance of the intended policy implementation, making PSHE statutory.

At this point my approach became less planned and more opportunistic, and ‘magpie’ like. Retrospectively, I call this broad information gathering stage ‘field investigation’ as I tried to understand and map the context of healthy relationships provision in local schools and colleges. However, this stage was not clear-cut. My initial visit to the school coincided with the delivery of one of six sessions to be delivered on ‘healthy relationships’ outsourced to a domestic violence charity. One session was to be presented six times to different tutor groups in year 10 (14-15 years old) I was invited to observe one of these sessions. I was introduced as ‘Sarah a researcher’ who was going to observe, and my presence appeared to go largely un-noticed. The class had 25 pupils, with a gender balance of 13 girls to 12 boys. The group appeared to have a real interest in the subject.

Even at this early stage in the research, young people’s understandings of ‘normal’ or ‘healthy’ relationships were both fascinating and worrying. For example, the use of mobile phones, and the acceptability of the level of texting was discussed. The young people were unsure if receiving 100 ‘I Love you’ texts each day was potentially problematic. All the young women chose ‘No; it was not problematic but argued that it was ‘romantic’. My field notes state: one boy said, “if you just started seeing someone, like the day before, and then you get that, that would be weird”. This example at the beginning of my journey highlighted the gendered nature of relationships and the problematic complexity of love and romance for young people. It also allowed me to ‘hear’ the discourse and to see a space for challenge in an educational context.

After the session the teacher was unable to discuss my research plan further, due to time pressure and other commitments, but was in support of it and was prepared to act as a sponsor, and I was invited to attend the next session. So far: so good... The second session was in the same building with the same set up, and a different tutor group. The session started well, then the facilitator was taken ill, and I was asked to cover for her?! This is an example of the messiness and non-linear nature of research, one which opens both opportunities and

ethical-procedural difficulties. I was aware that access can be potentially problematic and wanted to keep the teacher and school onside. Unsure of quite which hat I had on (was I now a researcher, an educator, a researcher-educator?), and if I was in fact even 'doing' my research yet, but wanting to step up to the request, I agreed.

Access was agreed, and then rescinded. As Hey (1997) points out this can happen at any point within ethnographic research! A plan had been formulated; however, just when my field work was due to start, the impact of structural changes in education took effect. The school changed to academy status, and the work that had been undertaken as part of the PSHE curriculum was scrapped. The policy of implementing PSHE had failed to materialise, and at the same time the domestic violence charity that was delivering the work had its funding so severely reduced that prevention work was cut. This intersection was a pivotal point of the process where I felt that socio-political and institutional shifts acted as barriers to essential contexts and the next backwards step was taken.

Back to the drawing board; and with the changes in the social and political landscape filtering through in contextualising and problematising my research, my lens widened further to encompass this simultaneous expansion and contraction. I continued to make 'cold' calls to schools but received no reply. I was very aware from the outset that the nature and sensitivity of my research may have been problematic with issues of school support; therefore, I had to think creatively. At this point the entire country's domestic violence services were facing major cuts, with services decimated; work that had been undertaken in schools was seriously affected. Most of this work had been unfunded in terms of a stand-alone service but was rather a commitment to awareness raising and primary prevention by DVA services out of core services budgets. So, due to the lack of school's work by third sector organisations my focus became concentrated on schools and their in-house delivery.

As a result of my professional networking, through both my work and research roles I was contacted by a trainer in the gender violence field who had heard about my research, and I was invited to attend several training events as part of my field investigation. I attended several 'train the trainer' courses, preparing for

'healthy teen relationships' classes in schools. The course attendees were made up of professionals from a range of services, including schools: teachers, school nurses, colleges, youth clubs, probation, social workers and police. From observing these sessions and in having conversations with the attendees, I ascertained each service's position on the issues, views and motivations for attending the training. The teachers all commented in line with evidence that suggests that there is a lack of proficiency in the teaching of RSE, resulting in a lack of confidence in delivering material they viewed as specialist and outside their remit; as the House of Commons Education committee found: "too much teaching is poor and that a lack of expertise among teachers of PSHE education leads to the avoidance of teaching sensitive and controversial issues, or to ineffective teaching". (2015: 36). However, many referred to the changes in funding and provision for third sector organisations and the need for schools to develop this work against the back drop of target driven education and a lack of support for PSHE and RSE.

Onward: and Upwards...

The elusive access issue continued, and time pressures started to impact, all playing out within the social and political context of austerity that was impacting on DVA services and the service I had worked for, which initially became skeletal, then ceased to exist. This situation: one of contraction on the one hand, was being played out arguably in an environment of expansion of greater social and cultural awareness and visibility of gender violence and control in its many guises; from the shocking gang rape of a young woman in India (Jyoti Singh in 2012), the shooting of Malala in Pakistan (<https://www.malala.org/malalas-story>); and the uncovering of decades of sexual abuse by Saville in the UK (HMICFRS, 2013). So, with various changes in ideas to my research and the awareness of its sensitivities I developed a more practical approach, maintaining the need for flexibility in real life research, and the need to keep trying!

I approached another charitable organisation that was still delivering some DVA services, but that had been drastically reduced. They were keen to support my research; as part of their services they were still working with young women who had experienced violence and abuse in their teen relationships and thought that they would actively like to participate. This process was helped by the fact

that one of the key workers was a previous student of mine. As an organisation they were concerned with the current situation and the need for services to be able to offer prevention work in schools and colleges as they had done for many years, up until their most recent funding crisis. Their position was becoming increasingly untenable and potentially coming to an end. This however, proved to be a fertile connection and I undertook two more interviews with young women, one in the offices of the charity, as part of my first phase. I was also introduced to a school that had an excellent pastoral system and a proactive PSHE team delivering prevention courses.

This school granted access for me to undertake my ethnography. My sponsors at the school were a group of support staff with support mentor system in place at the school that was very unusual in the area, operating a hub type 'drop in' system for a whole raft of academic and pastoral issues. I met with six of the team. The mentor team saw the effects of domestic violence and coercive control on the pupils who accessed their services, from the perspective of a child living in a household context of DVA and within teen relationships. They stated that 'domestic violence and abuse was one of the biggest factors in their work'. A large part of which was the role of new technologies and the blurred boundaries and parallel lives of the digital and 'real' world, and how this played out in an educational context. They were enthusiastically delivering a vital service. Part of their role was to deliver a 'healthy relationships' programme, having previously been supported by the domestic violence charity. My research plan was to be focused around the delivery of the programme. Following on from this meeting, I met with the head of PSHE, who was happy for me to undertake my research, as was the deputy head. So, over that summer holidays I received my DBS check, made my arrangements and was to finally start the major phase of my research at the start of the autumn term.

However, it was not to be that straightforward. At the start of the autumn term my husband and partner of 23 years was diagnosed with bowel cancer. The prognosis was bleak. I tried but was just unable to carry out my field work at that time. I told the school the situation and asked if it were possible to contact them at a later point. Instead of focusing on DVA I started to read academic journals on cancer. After a hellish journey through 18 months of cancer treatments; chemo, radiation and operations, I watched as my soul mate disappeared from

our lives. I then had to look after two young grieving boys, and everything else. My life, like my research was messy. Jim died on the 1st of February 2014, he was 48. Grief and trauma took their effect. I kept up with issues affecting my research area and thought about my research, but I was in no fit state to undertake it: so, I took time out.

Plan?...

A giant leap... backwards. In time I returned to my research, both myself and the context rather altered, but I would argue with a broader perspective on life and research. I returned on a part time basis and worked at the same time; juggling the competing needs of grieving children, research and work; the guilt from not being able to do any of these things well has, at times, been literally crushing. At this juncture I was aware of the social and political picture, however, the specifics of local provision had changed; prevention and the specific context of education; such as the academisation of schools, and the 'grit and resilience education' discourse. I was shocked to discover the decimation; the effects of the austerity cuts on services had been profound during my research break with areas of the country barely serviced with little if any school's work being undertaken. The overarching structure and strategy in relation to domestic violence services was demolished by the cuts. The contradictory position of the minimisation of services, strategy and policy, and the growing insistent and persistent calls from all areas to address gender violence and for education to address it, was bewildering.

Interestingly, despite the political context academic research in the area of domestic violence and abuse remained strong. Particularly in prevention: charting positive changes and innovations (Ellis & Thiara 2014; Stanley & Humphreys, 2015). Whilst I could identify with the positivity regarding the innovations and changes it was challenging to be optimistic in the socio-political landscape. After assessing the field from several angles, a contradictory, antagonistic picture continued to emerge in which to situate my research. In critically reflecting on these changes and challenges and the position of my work it emerged that my research was still valuable but needed a different approach. My research questions were still the same; I still wanted to examine the roles (existing and potential) that education could play in the domestic violence arena, but an alternative methodology was needed to address the

contemporary social, political and educational context and for my research to build on and extend other studies that had been undertaken in the intervening period.

My field investigation continued to be intertwined with my professional life. I became involved with another domestic violence charity whose services had also been much reduced; through this I was able to gain access to a sample of young women who had experienced domestic abuse in their own relationships. I undertook six further interviews. Having critically reflected on my research assemblage to date, and its aims, I felt that the ethical feminist position of giving voice to silent and marginal voices had become the primary focus of my research. Although the sample was small, with 10 participants, both the breadth and depth of participants' experiences provided a substantial body of data. Despite my circuitous route, and all the difficulties of accessing participants in such a fast-changing broader socio-political landscape, and locally under-resourced services, these interviews offer so much to the body of evidence on domestic violence and abuse in young women's teen relationships.

The significance of researching domestic violence:

"Violence against women continues to persist as one of the most heinous, systematic and prevalent human rights abuses in the world. It is a threat to all women, and an obstacle to all our efforts for development, peace, and gender equality in all societies"

(BanKi-Moon, 2007 United Nations Secretary General).

This quote by Ban Ki-moon clearly sets out the importance of addressing this 'heinous' abuse and its global impact. Violence against women has been described as a 'pandemic' and as Hearn & McKie argue it is, "the most pervasive human rights violation in the world" (2008: 39). I will come on to look at the definitions and terminology on page ten that demonstrate the 'seepage' and 'slippage' of terms that are on a continuum of gendered violence that produce a system where one aspect of violence shores up another to maintain and perpetuate gender inequality, with the specific focus of my research on domestic violence and abuse. It is estimated that 44% of all female homicide victims were killed by a current or former partner in England and Wales in the year 2014-15, this figure was estimated to be 50% globally in 2012 (UN; 2014).

In the UK and Wales this equates to an average of 102 women; so, on average two women are killed every week (Office of National Statistics, 2017), with this figure remaining consistent over the last 30 years. In 2016 a total of 113 women were killed by men in the UK, with 90 % of victims murdered by someone they knew, (The Femicide Census report, 2017).

There were a total of 1,031,120 domestic abuse-related incidents and crimes recorded by the police in England and Wales in the year ending March 2016 (ONS, 2017), and it is estimated that the police in England and Wales receive over one hundred calls concerning domestic violence and abuse every hour (HMIC, 2015); and it has been consistently estimated that one in four women in England and Wales will experience domestic violence in their lifetimes (Crime Survey of England and Wales, 2013/14); with this figure being around one in three globally (United Nations, 2015). It has been suggested that one in seven men experience domestic violence over their lifetime, however, the perpetrator is often a male partner, and in the case of homicide the perpetrator may be a male partner or 'love rival', or in retaliation by a victim (it should be noted that the figures for male victims/survivors arguably do not represent any form of parity with violence against women in terms of; impact, severity, context or pattern (Walby & Allen, 2004). In the year ending March 2016, 1.2 million women reported experiences of domestic abuse in England and Wales (Office for National Statistics, 2017), and the figures demonstrate that 46% of reported incidents were for rape or sexual assault (Office for National Statistics, 2017). The true extent of the issue is thought to be seriously underestimated, for a number of reasons: Walby (2016) has identified that there is a cap on the number of violent crimes recorded in official data - set at five per victim regardless of the actual number of incidents, with a suggestion that the actual figure could increase by 60% if the cap were removed. Evidence highlights that many experiences are not defined as such by the victim/ survivor as domestic violence or abuse until after the relationship is over. Domestic violence and abuse is a hidden crime that is characterized by secrecy and misconceptions, as my thesis will examine, therefore this is an area of chronic under-reporting and the true scale is therefore likely to be much higher.

The significance of researching young people's experiences of domestic violence and abuse:

The phenomenon of domestic violence and abuse in young people's relationships is a relatively new theme to emerge from research in the area of gender violence in the UK, previously thought to be an adult issue. There has been little research in the UK, seriously lagging the research and practice of the US, Canada and Australia, with notable exceptions (Burton et al, 1998; Chung, 2005; Power, et al 2006; Barter, et al, 2009; Wood and Sommers 2011; McCarry, 2010, Barter et al 2015). However, the substantial body of work in the US on 'dating' violence "testifies to its prevalence in teenage relationships" (Barter, 2011: 103). Research by Barter et al, confers with the US research and (although the term 'dating' violence does not translate to the UK context) found that statistics relating to relationship violence and abuse are consistent amongst teenage girls, with 1 in 4 being physically hurt by a person they were dating, with one in nine having been beaten, strangled, or hit with objects. Findings from the STIR (Safeguarding Teenage Intimate Relationships) European research project also report that "[b]etween a half and two-thirds of young women aged 14 to 17 years-old and between a third and two-thirds of young men from the five countries reported experiencing IPVA." (2015: 1). The research evidence in this area is clearly establishing that it is not just women and children who experience domestic violence and abuse, it is women and children, as Barter et al state "[c]learly, adult domestic violence starts at a much younger age than previously recognized." (2009:8). This is also borne out by the British Crime Survey 2017 that found that 16-19-year-olds were the age group most likely to suffer abuse from a partner. In recognition of this the government amended the definition of domestic violence in 2013 to include 16 and 17-year olds, however, as I go on to argue, the research evidence demonstrates that this lower age limit fails to identify, protect and support younger victims of domestic violence and abuse. The on-going prevalence and impact and the relative dearth of investigation in this area make it a significant area for research.

Boundaries and limits:

This thesis does not extend its boundaries to include research on boys and masculinity. Unfortunately, research on domestic violence and abuse polarises

girls as victim or 'survivor' and boys as perpetrators, and deals with the issues as distinct and separate. Evidence bears out the accuracy of the polarisation in terms of incidence, prevalence and impact; it is overwhelmingly women/girls who are victims of violence and men/boys perpetrators. However, I would argue that it is unhelpful to scrutinize one side of the issue without an investigation into the construction and discourse of dominant forms of masculinity and how they create and define gender and sexuality; masculinity is of utmost importance to the existence of DVA, however, it is not within the scope of this thesis, so will only be looked at in relation to the experiences of the young women in the research.

Definition and terminology:

With increased social and political awareness, and the acknowledgement of violence against women as a broad global public health issue (UN), the umbrella terms; 'violence against women (VAW)', 'violence against women and girls (VAWG)' have been utilised to encompass a wide range of overlapping, culturally specific, and globally generic concepts. This has been extended further to 'gender violence'/ 'gender-based violence', and these terms have been employed to encompass the variability of experiences and arguably to amplify and locate gender as pivotal. As Skinner et al (2005) explain;

"Gender violence includes all types of violence against women in the UN definition but is not confined to violence against women; thus recognising violence against children, young people or lesbian and gay people. The significance in using the term lies in the assertion that the violence is in some way influenced by or influences gender relations." (p.3)

These umbrella terms are inclusive of; domestic violence and abuse, rape, sexual assault, trafficking, prostitution, harassment, stalking, coercive control, political forms of torture, rape as a weapon of war, civil, communal and inter-ethnic conflict; and 'violence where women are perpetrators, but their involvement is still mediated by gender' (Skinner et al, 2005).

In the UK domestic violence has been the focus of gender violence (Skinner et al, 2005) and this single focus has pushed through changes in policy and practice; "even if domestic violence is not separate from and indeed overlaps with other violences against women" (Skinner et al, 2005: 2). Domestic violence is located on the 'continuum' (Kelly, 1998) of gender violence encompassing

seepage and slippage along the continuum that incorporates everyday sexism and inequality that feeds and informs a self-perpetuating system of gender violence. However, Dunne (2006) argues that this narrow focus on domestic violence has dominated and diverted research and policy resources away from other forms of gender violence. Although, according to Skinner et al, the 'single issue' approach was 'imperative' to produce change. Terminology is therefore contentious.

The definition and terminology conceptualising domestic violence has evolved since the confining and outdated term of 'wife battering', and there is a need for clarity in order to identify and measure these conceptualisations from different perspectives (Hester, 2004). The definition of domestic violence and abuse that is used cross-governmentally is now defined as:

any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to:

- *psychological*
- *physical*
- *sexual*
- *financial*
- *emotional*
- *Controlling behaviour*

Controlling behaviour is a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.

Coercive behaviour

Coercive behaviour is an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim.

(HM Government, 2018)

This definition was amended in both 2013; to reduce the age of victims, incorporating those aged 16 and 17, and in 2015 extending the definition to

include 'coercive control' to encompass behaviour which seeks to take away the victim's liberty or freedom that undermines their sense of self.

The terminology used in the area of domestic violence is multifarious along with their abbreviations: DA (Domestic Abuse); DV&A, DVA: (Domestic violence and abuse); Dating violence; Teen dating violence; IPV (interpersonal violence); IPVA (interpersonal violence and abuse); IPV (Intimate partner violence); RA, (Relational abuse); TRA (teenage relational violence) coercive control. I employ the term domestic violence and abuse and its abbreviation (DVA) throughout the thesis, in line with the current definition, and this considers victim/ survivor groups who wish to play down the predominance of physical violence thereby broadening understandings of a range of abuses. It also retains 'violence', and I concur with Donovan and Hester (2015), when they state:

"we in some respects, prefer the term 'domestic violence', as it emphasises the impact of the experiences and keeps in mind the extremity of fear and risk with which many victims/ survivors live" (p.6).

The inclusion of both 'violence' and 'abuse' accordingly maintains a clear link with the body of work undertaken by scholars and activists enabling a greater ability to categorise and quantify. Consequently, framing DVA as foundational, as the current definition enables, sustains and intensifies the proliferation of research to advance the knowledge base in order to enable profound change. The spotlight on DVA allows for diffusion, illuminating the interconnected nature and continuum of gender-based violence.

Young people and the terminology of domestic violence:

At present there appears to be little consensus on the definition and terminology that relates to young people's experiences of domestic violence and abuse. Scholarly undertaking in the US adopts the term 'Dating violence' however, as Barter et al (2009) identified this is inappropriate for the UK context, due to differing cultural relationship practices. This term 'domestic' is problematic for young people, as it is suggestive of living together, with most experiences taking place in public (Molidor and Tolman, 1998). 'Violence' places weight on the physical aspects when incidents may not be intrinsically violent (Hester et al, 2007); 'abuse' may minimise the incident, due to a failure in recognition of the severity and impact. Definitional complexity then further hinders the understanding of often complex experiences.

In this thesis I utilise the term DVA to apply to young people's relationships that were shared in their interviews. I do this for several reasons; firstly, the young women themselves refer to domestic violence and domestic abuse, so I will explore this in greater detail in the final data chapter on education. Arguably it may be the term that was employed as a result of support from DVA services; therefore, it may have been defined for them. However, as I argued above in relation to the continuation of adopting DVA, this applies to this younger age group too as I believe this will support in rupturing these experiences as violent, abusive, and unacceptable and in need of change. The definition in use arguably defines the experiences of the young women in my research in all ways: except age.

Victim / Survivor?

Throughout the thesis I use the dual term in recognition of the problematic nature for victims/ survivors of both 'victim' and 'survivor'. As I will come on to propose in chapter two, language has the power to construct a subjective reality and the two terms are heavily laden with connotations that impact a victim/survivor's sense and construction of their identities. 'Survivor' is agentic and "useful because it draws attention to women's agency in breaking free from abuse" (Hester & Radford, 2006: 39). It is a signifier of 'strong', 'brave' 'active' and 'stable', whereas 'victim' is constructed as 'weak', 'passive' but as Papendick and Bohner (2017:2) argue, 'also innocent'. These words are hierarchically gendered and create overriding ways of describing and (re)inscribing: on the one hand 'victim' suggests a lack of agency, thus perpetuating the myth that women in the context of DVA are not agentic; rendered passive or helpless, making undetectable the myriad of ways that women find to resist, (Hester, 2012; 2013), reject and rupture violence and abuse. On the other hand, 'survivor' can construct a misleading representation of victimhood that promotes a sense of responsibility in one's recovery. Arguably both terms could be put under erasure (Derrida in Spivak, 1997) due to their problematical nature; however, they will be used in conjunction in this thesis.

The impact of DVA:

The impact of domestic violence and abuse is arguably incalculable; it is vast, multifaceted and wide-ranging, and is dependent on multiple, often intersecting factors, such as the type and occurrence of the violence, and the subsequent accessibility of protective factors. The impact may result in; mental health issues, such as low self-esteem, depression & anxiety (Silverman et al, 2001), with one third of female suicide attempts attributable to current or past experiences of domestic violence (Mullender, 1996, Haqqi, 2008). The psychological impact has been found to be congruent with that of torture and the imprisonment of hostages (Hester et al, 2000), whilst many incidents of domestic violence result in serious injury, disability or death.

The impact may also lead to deprivations on many levels, related to poor health, housing and education. In a study by shelter in 2002 40% of all homeless women stated that domestic violence was a major contributor to their homelessness. The impact of experiencing domestic violence and abuse on children and teenagers is wide ranging - and may manifest in complex ways. They may exhibit aggressive or disruptive behaviors or may become depressed and withdrawn, affecting many areas of their home, social and school life impacting both their own school work and that of others. Children are also at increased risk of behavioral problems, emotional trauma, and mental health difficulties in adult life (Hester et al, 2000) and this can also act as a substantial factor in subsequent relationship experiences. I now move on to examine the factors that impact or may be viewed as potential 'risks' to young people experiencing domestic violence and abuse.

'Risk' Factors relating to DVA:

'Risk' factors offer a way of framing a rationale for exploring this cohort of participants, their experience of DVA and the role of education; by examining salient factors that may provide or promote a context that can underpin a broad notion of 'risk'. An examination of the risks of DVA can contextualise a subsequent review of the literature in chapter three, and what is known, and in identifying the gaps, offers a rationale for why education might have a part to play.

Risk factors are viewed here as 'elements that may contribute to or increase the risk of DVA'; this will be explored in relation to both the perpetration of DVA and the risk of victimisation of DVA. The risk factors I have identified are drawn from a range of research and to some extent the risk factors are contained under separate headings, however; risk factors are often multiple, overlapping, and interconnected, certainly without clear delineation. These overlaps may also be compounded by 'risky' behaviours associated with young people, thereby providing a complex matrix of factors to navigate, both for young people and researchers. Even if they can be delineated, young people may have more than one 'risk factor'. 'Risky' behaviour may be a coping mechanism associated with abuse, but at the same time may contribute to increased susceptibility or risk (Radford and Hester, 2006). The intersectionality of factors positions them as complex and entangled, but it is not clear if they are compounded and result in a greater susceptibility to be 'at risk'. Research suggests that there is a clear association between wider Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and experiences of a range of violence in adulthood; including DVA (Public Health Wales NHS Trust: 2015).

Primary factor ... Gender:

Gender is the primary lens through which I view DVA, as I will position throughout my thesis; gender is THE fundamental risk factor: domestic violence and abuse is gendered. Women and girls are the primary victim/ survivors with men and boys being the primary perpetrators of DVA. Men's violence against women is underpinned by gender inequality and domestic violence itself maintains and further perpetuates this inequality. Gender intersects with all other positional factors to further impact risk.

Age as a risk factor:

Adolescence is a critical developmental period and time of change; age then, is an intersecting dynamic that is evidenced as a major risk factor. As the work of Barter et al (2009) identified; congruent with research from other countries (America in particular) DVA in teenage relationships is a phenomenon in the UK that needs serious research and practice attention (Hird, 2000; Barter, 2009). Barter et al (2009) found that girls as young as 13 had experienced DVA. Further evidence (Burton et al, 1998; Hird, 2000; Barter, 2009; SafeLives

children's insights (2017); Zero Tolerance (2012); Gadd et al (2015) and End Violence Against Women) has also established that young people below the age of 16 are experiencing DVA in their relationships in the UK. In research for the European Commission, a transnational project found that "between a half and two-thirds of young women aged 14 to 17 years-old and between a third and two-thirds of young men from the five countries reported experiencing IPVA". (Barter et al, 2015: 1). Official statistics from 2017 (Office for National Statistics) show that young women from 16 to 25 are at greatest risk with those aged in the younger bracket of 16 -19 are at the greatest risk for the age group. However, the ONS does not provide evidence for those aged below 16. This is hugely problematic, evidenced by the fact that the young women interviewed in my research were all under 16 when they experienced DVA in their own relationships, so their experiences, and those of their peers, are rendered invisible.

Age Gap:

The age gap between victim/survivor and perpetrator is also a factor in DVA. Barter et al's (2009) study clearly identifies that many perpetrators of violence are adult men in relationships with adolescent girls, identifying serious safeguarding issues and potential child sexual exploitation (CSE) overlaps. Barter et al's research shows that:

"the vast majority of girls in a relationship with a "much older" male partner will experience multiple forms of partner violence, resulting in significant damage to their wellbeing. The level of exploitation and violence in these relationships was so pronounced that, in our view, any girl with a "much older" partner should be viewed as a child in need... "much older" partners, routinely represents a significant risk factor in professional assessments of harm." (2009: 189).

Domestic violence and abuse is underpinned by power and control and the potential for an abuse of power is increased through age difference (Barter, et al, 2009). Volpe et al (2013) draw on the work of DiClemente et al (2002) and Teitelman et al (2011), to explain the effects of the differential age on relationship power, demonstrating that adolescent girls have low relationship power in relationships with older partners. This has a huge impact on decision making, particularly in terms of 'unwanted, unprotected vaginal sex'. Volpe et al (2013) found that: '[a]dolescent girls with older male main partners are at

greater risk for adverse sexual health outcomes than other adolescent girls' (p.2068). This has significant implications for young women's relationships.

First relationships:

Whilst age is discussed above, more specifically first relationships can be a risk factor for DVA and young people are more likely to experience DVA in their first relationships. Adolescence is a time of change, a time of burgeoning sexuality and the forming of intimate relationships through coupling practices, and first relationships are an induction into the institution of heterosexuality, 'regardless of sexual orientation' (Chung, 2005). As Chung states:

"many young people take on gendered heterosexual identities as girlfriend or boyfriend in a dating relationship. This signifies to peer's progress toward adulthood which is associated with the successful performance of masculinity and femininity. The prerequisites for the performance of successful masculine and feminine heterosexuality" (2005: 447).

Such gendered performances of relationship scripts are an initiation into heteronormativity and the normalising of behaviours: taking up dominant discourses of love, gender roles and, inherently, the acceptability and normalisation of DVA. As Wood (2001) argues these narratives are reinforced by a broader gender narrative normalising man as controlling and dominating and positioning women in a subordinate role, responsible for the care and maintenance of the relationship.

Pregnancy as a risk factor:

DVA has been found to be connected to pregnancy and is located as a trigger point for the onset of abuse, however where DVA exists prior to pregnancy evidence suggests that there is an escalation in the violence (Cecutti, 1993; Bacchus, Mezey, & Bewley, 2004; Silverman et al 2001). Leneghan, Gillen & Sinclair (2012) found that "[p]regnant women are at an increased risk of domestic abuse, with prevalence rates of 5% to 21% during pregnancy and 13% to 21% postnatally". (p. 137). Other risk factors complicate this picture; Silverman et al (2001) found that age played a significant part in this complexity, as they highlight: "high school girls reporting experiences of violence from

dating partners were found to be approximately 4 to 6 times more likely than their non-abused peers to have ever been pregnant in this study.” p.(577). There is a complex link between ‘risky behaviours’ and risk, but more research is needed to unravel its interconnected nature, as Silverman et al (2001) point out regarding their research:

“[A]dolescent girls who report a history of experiencing dating violence are more likely to exhibit other serious health risk behaviour...[however] the mechanism and chronology involved in the relation between dating violence and pregnancy cannot be described by these data. It remains unclear, for instance, whether dating violence is associated with inability to use contraception and, if so, whether abusive partners actively prevent contraception or whether abused teens fear attempting to implement such measures. Although it may also be possible that other factors are responsible for both the occurrence of dating violence and pregnancy among adolescents, the implicit coercion involved in both sexual and physical partner abuse is likely to have implications for pregnancy prevention.” (p. 572).

Family violence:

Growing up in an environment where violence is accepted can have a significant influence on expectations within relationships, with important links observed between victimisation and perpetration and subsequent violence in adult intimate relationships (Dahlberg, 1998: Coker et al 2000; Barter et al, 2015). Family socialisation arguably normalises and reinforces the cultural acceptability of scripts of love and abuse, and this normalisation is difficult to reject without any alternative. It is estimated by Radford, Corral, Bradley, & Fisher (2013) that 29.5% of children in the UK, under the age of 18 have been exposed to DVA in their lifetime, with 5.7% of children and young people experiencing DVA in one year. Barter found that “nearly a third of girls and 16 per cent of boys reported some form of violence towards themselves or another adult in their family” (2011: 105). This is enormously concerning. However, the impact of this is unclear as there appears to be some confusion as Gadd et al point out:

“[w]hile the impact of exposure to domestic violence on children has been researched extensively since the early 1980s, the literatures on this subject continue to talk past one another in ways that are unhelpful” (2015: 110).

Maybe part of this problem is due to the void that exists as children's experiences and voices are underrepresented in academic literature and in professional practice (Callaghan et al, 2015). Arguably the gap in the literature around children's voices has been compounded by methodological difficulties as highlighted by Humphreys and Mullender's (2000) research. They refer to the intergenerational transmission of DVA and discuss issues relating to sample populations being drawn from offenders, or women in refuges, without the use of control groups, consequently skewing the data. Humphreys and Mullender (2000) also identify problematic definitional aspects relating to both DVA and to the childhood experience of DVA.

Despite these issues there is substantial evidence pointing to the risk factors of experiencing or witnessing (note that witnessing is experiencing, and the language needs to change to reflect this see Calaghan et al, (2015), Calagan, (2015)) DVA as a child and perpetration or victimisation in later life as Holt et al (2008) found:

"...children and adolescents living with domestic violence are at increased risk of experiencing emotional, physical and sexual abuse, of developing emotional and behavioural problems and of increased exposure to the presence of other adversities in their lives" (p. 797).

They conclude:

"...children may be significantly affected by the experience of domestic violence in their lives, the impact of which may resonate intergenerationally with their own involvement in adult violence (Markowitz, 2001)... there is rarely a direct causal pathway leading to a particular outcome (Wolfe et al., 2003) ... children are not passive participants but are active in constructing their own social world" (ibid, p 807).

This quote highlights the complexities of transgenerational DVA exposure which cannot be framed in a simplistic way. While recognising possible agency, it lays emphasis on the robust effect on future victimization and/or perpetration of violence, as also evidenced by Dahlberg's quote at the beginning of this section (1998). In Gadd et al's 'From Boys to Men' study, they found that 'the 13–14-year-olds who had witnessed abuse at home were almost three times more likely to report having perpetrated it (42%) than those who had not witnessed it

(15%)' (2015: 113). This corresponds with further data suggesting a strong link between experiencing domestic violence as a child and the perpetration or victimisation as an adolescent (Coker et al., 2000; Dahlberg, 1998; Foshee et al. (1999); O'Keeffe, Brockopp & Chew (1986); Gil-Gonzalez et al (2008); Barter et al 2009; Gadd et al 2015;). As Glass et al point out:

"[f]amily interactions and relationships provide the foundation of psychological and social development for children. If violence is at the cornerstone of this foundation, the developmental pathway to adult intimate relationships can be seriously affected" (2003: 232).

This has serious implications for ongoing risk. Despite the lack of clarity around the potentiality of the risk, it is thought to be substantial. It is critical to acknowledge that there are many children who grow up to experience DVA in their first (childhood) families who do not go on to perpetrate violence, or become a victim or survivor, however further research is needed to explore risk and protective factors. A further complicating factor is the role that structure, choice and agency play in both perpetrating and experiencing violence and abuse. Structural and experiential factors do pose risks, but as outlined above they do not make DVA a foregone conclusion. The remit of this thesis does not allow for a detailed discussion of this subject, but here too, education could play a role in opening up spaces in which choice and agency could thrive, allowing and encouraging robust challenge to conceptualisations and discourses of healthy relationships for young people.

In terms of victimisation, there is strong evidence making the connection between childhood experiences of maltreatment, including DVA and being vulnerable to becoming involved in violent relationships, sexual abuse and sexual exploitation (Finkelhor, Ormrod, & Turner, 2007; Turner, Finkelhor, & Ormrod, 2010; Finkelhor, Ormrod, Turner, and Holt, 2009; Radford et al, 2011). The childhood trauma of child sexual abuse may be one of the strongest risk factors in relation to victimisation of DVA (Coid et al. (2001); Cyr et al (2006); Silverman et al, (2001); Smith et al, (2003); Wekerle et al (2001); Wolfe et al (1998). For example; "in a sample of 1,207 women, Coid et al (2001) observed a significant association between unwanted sexual intercourse in childhood and all types of adult abuse (domestic violence, domestic violence by more than one

partner, rape, sexual assault, other trauma)” (Cited in Cyr et al., 2006: 1002). In a longitudinal study by H’ebert et al of 271 young women, their findings concur that the strongest predictor of partner violence was found to be child sexual abuse (CSA), as this quote reports:

“The overall prevalence compares with those reported in earlier studies of adolescence (12.3% in Silverman et al., 1996; 14.7% in Ackard & Neumark-Sztainer, 2003). Our data suggest that history of sexual abuse is associated with an increased frequency of dating violence in the first romantic relationships of teenaged girls. Nearly half of the girls who reported CSA also reported being victimized in their dating relationships, whereas one in four non-CSA girls reported experiencing dating violence in the past 6 months. These findings are consistent with those obtained in studies with adults, where CSA was found to increase vulnerability to violence in adult intimate partner relationships (Banyard et al., 2000; Coid et al., 2001)” (2008: 187).

These findings have serious implications for a vulnerability to risk for young women who have already experienced the trauma of CSA.

In research on intergenerational violence with school pupils in America, although now somewhat dated, it was found that over 50% of students who had experienced ‘dating violence’ had experienced or ‘witnessed’ parental DVA (O’Keefe et al., 1986). More recent research in the UK, (Barter:2011) found that girls with a history of family violence had a greater possibility of having a much older partner, which, as discussed above, has its own ramifications in terms of risk.

Peer Violence:

The contextual factor of the family is extended to the wider community context, with arguably greater influence on adolescents; the peer group. This has huge implications for young people at this critical time of social, emotional and intellectual development, creating a cultural context in which to develop relationships of all kinds. Research by Arriaga and Foshee (2004) posit that, ‘having friends in violent relationships’ as more influential than ‘parental factors’ in regard to teen relationships and DVA. As with the family, this context may provide a discomfiting milieu of violence, which can present itself in a myriad of ways. It may be that contextual acceptability and normalisation becomes a

localised dominant discourse of relationships. Peer group relationships therefore wield huge power and influence; Barter et al (2009) established that peer violence was found to be the 'strongest predictor of both experiencing and instigating partner violence'.

Bullying and associating with peers who used intimidation (Barter et al, 2015) has a knock-on effect in that young people are then more likely to experience interpersonal difficulties in both intimate relationships and friendships (Black, Sussman, & Unger, 2010; Siegel, 2013), including being more likely to bully or experience bullying. Experiences of bullying as a perpetrator are thought to then morph into abusive relationships, as asserted by Giordano et al (2010), that during the transition to adolescence, and the emergence of sexuality and romantic relationships, youngsters who bully, frequently appear to transfer their power-asserting aggression to dating relationships.

Social Class:

Research has shown that there are competing discourses relating to class and DVA; on the one hand DVA is viewed as a universal phenomenon that cuts across class lines. This view is juxtaposed with the image of a couple that symbolically holds the popular imagination of DVA perpetrator and victim: the 'Chav' 'a ubiquitous term of abuse for white working-class subjects' (Tyler, 2008); and an insult deployed to demonise the working class (Jones; 2011). The chav has arguably replaced the underclass and it is the more public image of violence and delinquency with which many regard perpetrator and victim/survivor of DVA. There is credence to the argument that women who report and seek services are more likely to be known to both statutory and non-statutory service providers thereby providing a particular profile of victim/ survivor. The same can be said for perpetrators, providing a smoke screen in relation to class and the public's perceptions of the profile of perpetrators. Dahlberg (1998) found that neighbourhoods in America that were characterized by high rates of poverty were contributing factor in high rates of DVA in adolescence. However, in relation to disadvantage and social class in Britain, Barter et al established that "no association was found with social deprivation" (2009:196). The intersection of social class with other factors such as ethnicity however is

thought to play a part in DVA, intersectionality compounding individual risk factors. Research is consistent in terms of findings related to the widespread experiences of women from all socioeconomic backgrounds, so gender is, as made evident, the unifying factor. It may be that class provides a different experience of DVA, and for some this may provide protective factors; however high levels of control rather than physical violence are present in DVA homicides that are arguably subtler and more hidden prior to homicide. Again, this cuts across class factors.

However, in relation to young people and perpetration of DVA in the UK context, Hird, identified a 'positive correlation' with male use of physical aggression and social class, as she states:

"The social class of the father was significantly related to frequency of the use of physical aggression. Working-class students reported greater use of physical aggression than middle- or upper-class students." (2000: 72).

Yet, the evidence is patchy and inconsistent, and it appears methodologically difficult to access young people in relation to relationships, abuse and class. In attempting to do this Barter et al found that they were unable to recruit schools from the independent sector and more affluent areas; therefore, making comparisons difficult. From my own experience in trying to recruit schools from the independent sector to participate in my research the statement that "it does not happen in our types of schools" does not hold weight when gender is the defining factor of DVA, and as evidenced by Naomi Holford's PhD looking at DVA in young middle-class relationships; but further research is needed. A striking finding by Barter et al is related to geographical location; 'it is noteworthy that incident rates for sexual violence were significantly higher for all three rural schools' (2009:190). Barter et al's findings are both interesting and concerning, and worthy of future investigation.

Same Sex partners:

As with the other risk factors, same sex relationships have the potential to exacerbate opportunity for DVA. There is limited evidence of domestic violence and abuse in young people's same sex relationships (Donovan et al 2006:

Donovan and Hester, 2015), possibly demonstrating the intersections or layers of 'hiddenness' associated both with some same sex relationships and with DVA. In the first major piece of research undertaken in the UK into DVA in same sex relationships Donovan et al (2006), highlighted its 'hidden' nature. Their findings point out that:

"[s]exuality is a tool of control used especially by women and often involves the abusive partner using their own lack of being out, or denigration of the scene to control their partner's access to friendship/support networks" (2006: 22).

These layers of 'hiddenness' have the potential to compound abuses; leading to a reluctance in reporting and seeking help. However, information is contradictory on this subject. Donovan et al also found that "[a]s with surveys of heterosexual communities, those aged 25 years and under are more likely to report domestic abuse" (2006:22), and King et al (2003) identified that young people in same sex abusive relationships are more likely to seek professional help. However, in the NSPCC research Barter et al found 'little difference in reporting levels' of young people in same sex relationships (2009: 193).

Barter et al's (2009) research provides concerning evidence in relation to gender symmetry in young people's same-sex relationships of violence perpetration, as they state:

"Young people with a same-sex partner were significantly more likely to experience all three forms of partner victimisation compared to those with an opposite-sex partner... same-sex relationships seemed to contain very worrying levels of shared violence, where both partners were simultaneously instigating and receiving violence" (p. 192).

Due to the limited numbers involved and general lack of research into DVA, young people and same sex relationships, Barter et al (2009) state caution in relation to these findings but discuss the complexities and overlaps with other risk factors such as peer and family violence. They emphasise their caution stating: "we cannot be certain if the same-sex relationship itself increased the possibility of violence, or the combined influence of other associated factors, or perhaps and more plausibly, a combination of both" (2009: 192). Fineran and Bolan (2006) also found an interconnecting relationship between same sex partner abuse and other factors such as 'family victimisation' and 'delinquency' as risk factors for victims and Donovan & Hester (2008; 2015) identify a 'strong

link' between first same sex relationships and DVA and this had an association with younger age groups. These findings suggest that further research is needed to enable an unravelling of the factors relating to these intersections. However, despite the understandable caution exercised by Barter et al, their findings provide strong evidence to suggest that the lens of sexuality must not be clouded by heteronormativity in relation to DVA and young people.

Ethnicity:

As with other areas relating to DVA, incidents concerning minority ethnic groups are under reported and are also defined in alternative terms; as so called 'honour' based and forced marriage. However, they represent large populations from diverse backgrounds and can occur in Christian, Jewish, Sikh, Hindu, Muslim and other communities. It has been suggested by the Home Affairs Select Committee 2008; and Brandon and Hafez (2010); that it is 'probably more common in some groups, for example, some Pakistani, Kurdish, and Gypsy and Traveller communities, reflecting a more oppressive patriarchal ideology'. Evidence proposes that forced marriage affects both men and women, however, age is a major factor: Kazmirski et al (2009) found that in 41% of cases reported to local organisations the person being forced to marry was younger than 18. Issues of forced marriage and so called 'honour' based violence can involve wider family, peer and communities that encompass multiple perpetrators, with so called 'honour killings', with age 16 found to be a 'trigger point'.

Complexity of factors:

The research shows that there are other factors that I have not covered here as main themes, but these may be bound up in a complex interplay with the above themes, they might include: looked after young people in care (Jonson-Reid et al, 2007; Knight et al, 2006), homelessness, gang membership, and online abuse. There is an intersectionality of risk then and these entanglements compound, complexify and obscure, therefore they cannot be seen in isolation. As I have stated, gender is the primary lens through which I view domestic violence and abuse, therefore positioning it as THE fundamental risk factor; women and girls are the primary victim/ survivors with men and boys being the primary perpetrators. A crucial factor that I shall explore in greater depth is that

young women who had experienced DVA were up to six times more likely to have been pregnant than their non-abused peers (Silverman et al; 2001). As discussed above, low relationship power for young women results in male control over reproductive aspects of a relationship, and I will come on to examine how this may be bound up in the complexities of abusive relationships.

So along with gender, age is identified as a major factor that plays a role in relation to both the age of the survivor/ victim; the age gap between partners and the fact that this links to the commencement of first romantic relationships. Young women of 16-25 are identified by the Office for National Statistics (2017) at greatest risk. However, the application of the cross governmental definition that defines abuse from the age of 16, is enormously problematic, as the research evidence demonstrates: young people below the age of 16 are experiencing DVA in their relationships in the UK (Barter et al 2009 Hird, 2000; 2011, 2015; SafeLives children's insights (2017); Zero Tolerance (2012); Gadd et al (2015) and End Violence Against Women). In relation to the age gap between partners Barter et al (2009) highlights that any girl/ young woman with a partner deemed to be 'much older', '*routinely represents a significant risk factor*' (p. 189). First relationships in adolescence encompass a multiplicity of shifts and the performing of gendered presentations to signify these performances. The take up of gendered and sexualised scripts and identities as an initiation to heteronormative behaviours are then reinforced by broader gender narratives that normalise male behaviours as controlling and dominating, subsequently positioning femininities in a subordinate role. This is all played out against the backdrop of education, within the context of schools. The role of education is arguably complex and contradictory, it provides a conducive context in which gender violence can flourish, it also has the potential for prevention and change, and this tension will be worked with throughout the thesis. I move on to frame the policy context for this argument.

The policy context:

In order to further situate my research, I examine here the policy context of education as a preventative measure to address young people's experiences of DVA. Barter et al's (2009) pivotal research for the NSPCC brought national attention to the issue of violence and abuse in teen relationships, prompting a

response by the government along with a public consultation on domestic violence. A cross-governmental strategy set out the first coordinated approach to address issues of violence and abuse against women and girls; the VAWG strategy set out three key areas: prevention, protection and provision. A key action of the strategy for prevention stated that the “inclusion of gender equality and violence against women in the programme of study for personal and social wellbeing when PSHE is made part of the statutory part of the National Curriculum in September 2011” (Home office, 2009: 26). This was a very welcome proposal, nevertheless with a change of government in the UK in May 2010, the specifics of the VAWG strategy to implement PSHE as statutory fell under the radar and the policy implementation disappeared.

Although the new government stance was in support of the VAWG strategy, when updated in March 2011 the ‘Action Plan’ which listed 88 points, failed to include the implementation of policy for placing issues of relationships and domestic violence in the National Curriculum. The prominence of the issue continued with public and professional pressure. Teachers, having long supported the statutory status of RSE with many teaching unions lobbying for this, as Russell Hobby, General Secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT), said:

“NAHT have long advocated age-appropriate sex education and PSHE for all pupils in all schools, to help prepare young people for the challenges they will encounter in their adult lives and the current challenges they will face beyond the school gates...” (2017)

This was supported by parents, as highlighted in a recent YouGov poll suggesting 91% of parents believe all pupils should receive PSHE lessons to teach about the risks of sexting, as well as other issues such as contact from strangers online. Representatives from parent bodies, such as PTA UK and Mumsnet also supported the call for RSE to be compulsory. Research by the Sex Education Forum, based at leading children's charity the National Children's Bureau (NCB) found that parents want their children to be taught to ‘understand their bodies, appropriate behaviour, and online safety’. The evidence also suggests that 78% of parents surveyed want children to learn about the difference between safe and unwanted touch with 72% of parents stating that primary schools should ‘educate children on what to do if they find online pictures showing private body parts or are asked to send them’.

As well as parents and teachers it is young people themselves that are calling for a dependable, consistent method of RSE. Evidence from a recent poll by Barnardo's (2018) of 11-15-year olds stated that they believe 'children would be safer if they had age appropriate classes on RSE'. This supports survey findings of 16 to 24-year-olds carried out by the Terence Higgins Trust (2016) that 99% of young people thought RSE should be mandatory in all schools; with 1 in 7 stating that they had not received this education. A report by Ofsted (2007) reported on young people's views:

"many young people say that parents and some teachers are not very good at talking about the more sensitive issues in PSHE, such as sex and relationships ... young people do not want just the biological facts but want to talk about feelings and relationships." (p. 3).

Ofsted inspectors also found evidence to support this claim; teachers, governors and parents all reported having received insufficient guidance to support them in talking to young people about such sensitive issues. Parents' voices, from a range of research studies (Sherbet Research 2009; Durex and others 2010; Sex Education Forum), see school and home as the two main sources of relationship and sex education (RSE), and parents were very clear that teachers need relevant training, with 80% surveyed by the Sex Education Forum stating that those teachers that teach RSE should have specific training in the subject. The picture emerging from research with young people however questions the delivery of RSE by teachers, as Pound et al highlight:

"only 19% of 18-year olds feel SRE should be taught by a teacher from their school... teachers may be inherently unsuitable for delivering SRE because of the nature of the student-teacher relationship. This relationship is ideally constructed as desexualised, so discussing sexual issues can be difficult for teachers and may disrupt attempts to control sexualised behaviour." (2016: 10).

This point is supported by the sex education forum in their 'principles of good sex education'; stating 'It should be taught by staff regularly trained in relationship and sex education and PSHE, with expert visitors invited in where appropriate'. The recommendation that education needs to be informed by specialist organisations to support and inform good practice in this area is not new. Charity and community initiatives have been involved in developing,

delivering and supporting domestic violence prevention programmes in schools in the UK for the last 30 years, however this has been ad hoc, with schools opting in/out if they chose. So, although many schools have, and do, cover sex and relationship education, this has not been mandatory and issues relating to DVA have been treated as an aside. Sex and relationship education (SRE) more broadly have often been delivered by staff from a range of departments with little or no expertise or desire to teach the subject. Many teachers, although keen to deliver inclusive education, lack the knowledge or confidence to do so; with 7 in 10 teachers saying that ‘they need more training to deliver the subject properly’ (Sex Education Forum, 2014).

Following on from this continued pressure, a renewed governmental response did not materialise until 2016, when, informed by the findings of the women and equalities committee report on sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools, it regained policy attention. The chairs of the education, business, innovation and skills, home affairs and health committee called on the Secretary of State to implement statutory status to PSHE and SRE, as the report states:

“sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools is having an impact on young people and school life. Consequences include: physical and emotional harm, including teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases; girls feeling unable to fully participate in educational and extra-curricular opportunities; teachers spending valuable time dealing with incidents of sexual harassment and bullying; and young people developing a sense that sexual harassment and sexual violence are acceptable behaviours and learning social norms that are carried through to adult life.”

In response, the committee’s recommendations state that:

“every child at primary and secondary school must have access to high-quality, age-appropriate relationships and sex education delivered by well-trained individuals. This can only be achieved by making SRE a statutory subject; investing in teacher training; and investing in local third sector specialist support.” (House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee; *Sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools: Third Report of Session 2016–17*).

The government then announced on March 1st, 2017 in a tabled amendment to the ‘Children and Social Work Bill’, that all schools in England are to teach RSE/SRE (Relationship and Sex education) in all primary, secondary, maintained and academy schools. Regulations and statutory guidance have

just been sought through a full public consultation (February 2018). It is thought that guidance for RSE will be updated from its previous 2000, now outdated version, to reflect the current VAWG informed understanding of issues such as consent, 'sexting' and internet safety. As Justine Greening stated in a press release whilst Education secretary:

“RSE and PSHE teach children and young people how to stay safe and healthy, and how to negotiate some of the personal and social challenges they will face growing up and as adults. These subjects form part of the building blocks young people need to thrive in modern Britain. At the moment, too many young people feel they don't have the RSE they need to stay safe and navigate becoming an adult.”

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/schools-to-teach-21st-century-relationships-and-sex-education>): (Accessed 20.03.18).

The new compulsory RSE, welcomed by many, was due to be implemented in September 2019, however the Department for Education are now seeking views on 'draft regulations, statutory guidance and a regulatory impact assessment for relationships and sex education and health education'. The draft states that parents will have the right to withdraw their children from sex education; however, they will not have this right for 'relationships education', in either primary or secondary school. In light of the consultation process the implementation will be delayed and all schools will be required to follow the new curriculum by September 2020, with pilot and early adopter schools from September 2019. There has never been a statutory policy on RSE in England ensuring all children and young people receive mandatory education about relationships.

Rationale and broad aims:

The rationale for my research then is underpinned by the fact that domestic violence and abuse is a severe issue that has been described as a 'pandemic', whilst being drastically under recorded and underreported. There is certainly a huge impact on women and children, with a continued ripple effect throughout society with the reverberations felt both intergenerationally and intragenerationally. At its extreme it consistently accounts for the deaths of an

average of two women a week in England and Wales, and this figure has arguably not been impacted by research, policy, practice or activism. The findings on 'risk' factors provide evidence to support Barter et al's (2009) claim that violence and abuse starts at a much younger age than previously recognized.

However, despite this being a burgeoning body of evidence, most of the research has been quantitative, and although this is a very positive trajectory, with further optimism inspired by the range of research and practice in the area (Ellis & Thira, 2014; Stanley & Humphreys, 2015) finally being heard. Along with a growing of support from both statutory and non-statutory bodies; education, parents and most importantly young people themselves, that believes in the urgent need for relationship education and for it to address the prevention of domestic violence and abuse. It currently leaves many queries unanswered; issues relating to pedagogy; who, what, how to teach, and the gendered heterosexualised setting of schools. There is a need to further explore young people experiences, in greater depth, to appreciate how they negotiate and understand these experiences. Arguably advocating for a broader research approach to the contexts of young people's situated experience would allow for a more considered approach to addressing change. This includes the school context, both formal and informal to look at the role of education in the prevention of gender violence.

The context of education in relation to DVA requires problematising. The research demonstrates that a significant proportion of young people are experiencing violent and abusive relationships placing them simultaneously in education. However, education is a milieu of gendered and heterosexualised intensification and arguably domestic violence is part of a continuum of gender violence, that in the environment of education is preceded, although not linearly, by a range of 'everyday' 'gendered' and 'violent' acts that provide a conducive context for domestic violence to be enacted and to flourish. Stein makes this link explicit and states educational contexts act as:

"training grounds for the insidious cycle of domestic violence. Girls...in essence they are trained to accept the battering and assault. Boys, on the other hand, receive permission, even training to become batterers" (1995: 148).

This demonstrates the intense, problematic and often contradictory positioning of education. Therefore, rather than add to the voices that are making calls on education to address this crucial issue I propose an exploration of young people's experiences across and including the context of education to ascertain how this is experienced by young people and their thoughts to impact change.

My research project is distinctive in its approach to the issue of young women's experiences of relationship abuse and the role of education. The methodological approach I have taken is at variance with much of the existing quantitative research. My intention is to put flesh on the bones of the quantitative data, utilizing in-depth narrative interviews, "to fully understand women's experiences and theories these experiences with a view towards social change" (Westmarland, 2001:28). My unique contribution is in exploring young women's experiences of domestic violence and abuse in their own relationships, through in-depth narrative interviews; across contexts, and in analysing their understandings of their experiences through a gendered lens by employing feminist post-structural insights, against a backdrop of education: the role it played and their views of its potential in addressing domestic violence and abuse. Considering the context and rationale these are the broad aims underpinning my research:

Aims:

1. To explore young people's experiences of domestic violence and abuse in their own relationships.
2. To appreciate how young people construct, understand and make sense of these experiences.
3. To examine how these subject positions have been formed and negotiated by family, peers, cultural and educational contexts.
4. To scrutinise the role of education in these experiences.
5. To explore young people's views and ideas on the role that education could play in relation to domestic violence and abuse.

Organisation and outline of the thesis chapters:

In the next chapter, chapter two I move on to present my epistemological and ontological positioning and examine the theories that I draw on to locate the work within a feminist post-structural framework. I explore the role of feminism in identifying domestic violence and abuse and problematise its current position in the light of little change to the incidence and impact and propose ways to support developing theory to progress understandings in support of transformation. In chapter three I draw together a focused literature review that examines a range of perspectives in which to situate my data. This chapter is divided into two sections, in the first I examine gendered discourses of love and relationships infused by popular culture; of fairy tales and Disney and draw on Wood's (2001) concept of the dark romance; how violence and abuse are entwined within these dominant discourses that serve to hide, condone and perpetuate violence and abuse. I move on to the concept of love and the simultaneity of domestic violence, to problematise and challenge this complex duality; supported by narratives of victim blaming and 'practices of love' (Donovan and Hester 2015). I also look at how these discourses frame reproductive choices for young women in the context of domestic violence and abuse. In the second section I move on to scrutinise the role of education, in both a broad and narrow sense; on the one hand its role in creating a 'conducive context' in which gender violence can flourish, but also on the other, its role in preventing gender violence. I conclude this chapter by setting out my specific aims for the research. In the succeeding chapter I present my research methodology; informed by my theoretical framework and my underpinning aims, and through this chapter I share my reflections of my 'rough' journey as a novice researcher. I undertake a discussion of feminist methodology and its relation to ethics and how this impacted on my methodological choices in this area of sensitive research.

The data analysis chapters then follow from chapter five, and I start by introducing my participants through their situated narratives and I do this by examining the impact of the broad factors that shaped their experiences of domestic violence and abuse. In chapter six I explore their experiences of domestic violence and abuse, and develop this further through the 'Young women's voices' in chapter seven by thematically exploring the young women's

understandings and how they made sense of these experiences by drawing on both the theoretical aspects outlined in chapter two and underpinned by the literature review in chapter four; enabling a further unravelling of the data. In chapters eight and nine I continue to thematically explore young women's relationship practices and understandings across contexts with a focus on their experience of reproductive 'choices', pregnancy and motherhood. The final data chapter on education examines the young women's experiences and understandings in the context of education, but also their ideas and imaginings in relation to schools as the site in which to address domestic violence and abuse. I conclude the thesis in the final chapter by drawing the threads of these contexts together, summarising the findings and highlighting my contribution to knowledge and their implications for policy and practice.

Chapter two: Theoretical framework

In this chapter I set out some key theoretical concepts and discuss the broadly feminist post-structuralist framework within which I situate my work. This chapter will therefore explore theories relating to gender and sexuality in order to frame my own research on young people's experiences and understandings of domestic violence; and the role education played and could have played in this context. The theoretical frameworks being drawn upon in this thesis have been influenced by the social, cultural and historical context from which they emerged. Many of the concepts are contested and have traversed through periods of transformation: the theories are at times messy and contradictory. I start by locating some of the key theoretical concepts through their emergence and development and the ways of thinking about gender and sexuality. I move on to consider concepts of patriarchy, discourse, subjectivity, agency and power by utilising feminist and post-structural intellectual scholarship. I conclude the chapter by examining theory as it relates to the study of domestic violence and abuse and suggest ways forward by utilising a feminist post-structural approach.

Modernity and second wave feminist theory: Gender and Sexuality

The period of the late 1960s and the early 1970s heralded the second wave feminist movement, a time of political activism, burgeoning from identity politics and new social movements. The women's movement was founded on the notion of a universal sisterhood, with the agenda of challenging the oppression of women. However, this movement was fractured, characterised by a variety of feminist thought (Tong, 1998).

Radical feminism was one of the emergent strands of feminist theorising; arguably a departure from the sense of modern rationality encapsulated by other strands of feminism, assembled as they were from existing modes of thought such as Marxism and Liberalism. Radical feminists made the shift in the construction of femininity as 'subject'; placed at the centre, rather than 'Other' - in relation to masculinity, which was crucial to feminist thought. Radical feminism then embodied a range of theories based on women's experiences; subjectivity instead of objectivity, which would not be confined to any other

agenda, and was not a discarded by-product (in reference to the other strands of feminism).

The fundamental concept utilised by radical feminism and harnessed by the second wave feminist movement was 'patriarchy'; adopted from the Greek for "the rule of the father", it is still a key concept at the heart of feminist theorising demonstrating the systematic disadvantaging of women. Sylvia Walby in her influential work 'Theorizing Patriarchy' (1990) defined it as, "a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women." (p.20). Patriarchy is an enormously authoritative concept that identified the power between masculinity and femininity and analyses the power relations operating in the private sphere as well as the public. Walby (1990) set out a comprehensive argument examining 'different sites' of the patriarchal framework, including; work, housework, culture, sexuality, violence, and the state, to explain women's subordination. She argued for the need for the concept and theory of patriarchy stating:

"patriarchy is essential to capture the depth, pervasiveness and interconnectedness of different aspects of women's subordination, and can be developed in such a way as to take account of the different forms of gender inequality over time, class and ethnic group." (Walby: 1990: 2).

Patriarchy privileges men and "[i]t is also organised around an obsession with control and involves as one of its key aspects the oppression of women." (Johnson, 2005: 5). Feminist theorists have utilised the concept of patriarchy as either a primary cause of women's oppression, or as part of a cooperating system with capitalism (Hartmann, 1976); and/ or racism (Lorde, 1984). The naming of patriarchy allowed the normalcy and common sense of male power to be challenged and its power to be contested. However, 'woman' as a concept was centrally placed and this hinged on an essentialist notion of a 'universal sisterhood', therefore women's subordinate position was seen as being the same across time and space (Daly, 1978), rather than culturally and historically specific. This essentialist positioning rests on a biological assumption, ultimately fixing women's subordination on a universalistic unchangeable position; thereby providing no solutions.

The social construction of gender:

A solution to essentialist notions, challenging the fixity of 'women'; having a universal 'essence' based on their biological sex, was the separation of 'sex' and gender. Gender: a term that is in everyday usage, simultaneously unproblematic and highly problematic. In popular discourse it is often considered as a 'natural' division based on biological sex, and the terms sex and gender have historically been conflated and used both synonymously and interchangeably. However, specifically, sex can be viewed as the biological and physical differences attributed to male and female, whilst gender is a social construct arguably on a continuum of identities associated with masculinities and femininities.

Gender then has been used as a synonym for biological sex: with biological determinists and essentialist theories having dominated mainstream thinking, propositioning fixed biological notions of gender based on physical sexual characteristics. This still holds firm in some 'common sense' notions and its problematic nature continues to inform dominant social and cultural discourses. One of the first major challenges to essentialism is considered to be the seminal work by Ann Oakley in 'Sex, Gender and Society' (1972), drawing on psychologist Robert Stoller's (1968) work; Oakley began using the term 'sex' to identify biological traits and 'gender' to recognise the amount of femininity and masculinity a person exhibited. Oakley moved on to argue that "far from falling into two discrete groups, male and female have the same body ground-plan, and even the anatomical difference is more apparent than real." (1985: 18). Oakley's clear distinction renders biological sex separate to gender, and gender as foundational to inequality. This distinction between sex and gender enabled feminists to argue that the differences between men and women are socially produced, as De Beauvoir states "it is civilisation as a whole that produces this creation, intermediate between male and eunuch who is described as female...One is not born but rather becomes a woman." (1988: 295-297). This notion of gender as a social construction within the specific cultural and historical location of a society unravelled the notion of gender as a fixed, natural and binary division; this was the basis for enabling change through social and political reform. The distinction drawn between sex and gender was a unifying notion of second wave feminism, arguing, that the concepts are not fixed but

fluid, open to challenge and change. As Rubin describes; gender is “the socially imposed division of the sexes.” (1975: 179); arguably therefore, through the social it can be displaced.

Gender then can be viewed as a social construct, a way of dividing up the world in order that human beings may make sense of it. Bradley (1996) defines it in this way:

“Gender refers to the varied and complex arrangements between men and women, encompassing the organisation of reproduction, the sexual divisions of labour and cultural definitions of femininity and masculinity.” (1996: 205).

However, gender is a much debated and contested term; problematic, slippery and ‘busy’; due to its usage and meaning in a diversity of contexts, and Bradley (ibid) argues that it’s “‘slipperiness’ arises from the fact that this is a highly politically charged concept. Its use is inextricably bound up with the centuries-long struggles over power between men and women.” (1996: 1). Gender is the pivotal political concept at the heart of domestic violence and abuse. Throughout the thesis I take gender to be socially constructed.

Gender and sexuality:

Like the concept of gender, sexuality has been located in the history of evolutionary biology and reduced to sex: However, feminists have long criticised the confining biological notions of sexuality, arguing, that like gender, sexuality is a more fluid socially constructed concept. For Holland et al (1998) sexuality:

“implies sexual beliefs and desires and also how these are socially negotiated and constructed in social relationships. Sexuality is simultaneously variable bodily states, desires and physical practices, and also culturally variable understandings of this embodiment and its meaning.” (p. 23).

For MacKinnon (1989) however, the theory of sexuality is the same as the theory of gender, she views the social meaning of sex as created through a ‘hierarchy of sexualised power relations’; arguing that women are viewed as objects for satisfying men’s desires. Masculinity is thus defined as sexual dominance and femininity as sexual submissiveness, with gender and sexuality “created through the eroticization of dominance and submission. The man/woman difference and the dominance/submission dynamic define each other. This is the social meaning of sex”. (1989: 113). Sexuality can be seen

then as referring to sexual identity and sexual practices and it is historically and culturally bound; combining physical, emotional, social and material factors. It straddles the realm of public and private. Rich's (1983) concept of 'compulsory heterosexuality' demonstrates this binding of gender and sexuality, which produces and delineates gender roles and their 'correct' performance of sexuality in both the local, and the global context. The dominant global discourse of sexuality is perceived heterosexuality; a universally prevalent institution for the organisation of relationships that is, "imposed, managed, organised, propagandised and maintained by force" (Rich, 1983: 21), therefore structuring heterosexuality as compulsory. Tolman et al (2003) suggest that "[t]his institution of heterosexuality is comprised of unwritten but clearly codified and compulsory conventions by which males and females join in romantic relationships" (p.160). It is therefore political in nature serving male needs. The institution of heterosexuality arguably requires coercion or force (Rich: 1983; Tolman et al: 2003), as Tolman et al (ibid) contend: " [v]iolence against women and the constant threat of it (including sexual harassment and rape), coupled with incitements for women to devalue their relationships with other women, sustain and perpetuate this institution to insure that it functions unconsciously and imperceptibly for most individuals." (p. 160). Gender and sexuality are interwoven with heteronormativity underpinning hierarchical romantic relationships.

Post-structural thought: gender and sexuality

The dominant challenge to modernist thought on gender and sexuality came in the form of post modernism and post-structuralism, termed the 'postmodern turn' of the 1990s. This paradigm shift centred on the rejection of modernist ideas of 'structure', 'binary difference' and 'essentialism' and focused on relationships between knowledge(s), power, relationships and identities. Language became the unifying 'common factor', in challenging modernist notions, as Weedon (1997) identifies:

"language is the place where actual and possible forms of social organization and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested. Yet it is also the place where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, is constructed. The assumption that subjectivity is constructed implies that it is not innate, not genetically determined, but socially produced. Subjectivity is produced in a whole

range of discursive practices – economic, social and political – the meanings of which are a constant site of struggle over power.” (p.21).

So, identity thought to be ‘fixed’, definite, based on natural biological factors and on historical enlightenment thinking was (re)conceptualised as constructed through language; fluid and open to negotiation. The work of Foucault has been instrumental in placing subjectivity and its discursive practices around gender and sexuality on the theoretical agenda (Weedon, 1987: 12). Foucault challenged the notion of ‘fixity’, by rejecting masculinist concepts of ‘the rational actor’, as Bradley (2007) points out: “[d]ismissing this notion of the ‘essential self’, Foucault replaced it by the notion of ‘discourses’, often quasi-scientific which actually construct human subjects.” (p. 66).

The supposition that gender and sex are fluid, historically and culturally contingent, was extended to the concept of sexuality. Through his work in ‘The history of sexuality’ (1980) Foucault demonstrated the ways in which different sexual categories are socially and historically contextual; therefore, socially and discursively constructed. Sexuality is produced through discourse. It is this anti-essentialist notion of sexuality that has been influential on feminist post-structuralist scholarship (Ramazanoglu 1993; McNay 1994). Butler’s (1990) theorisation of gender and sexuality has been highly significant. In her ‘distinctive approach’ (Bradley, 2007), Butler (1990) argues that it is through repeated daily acts or ‘performativity’, that we ‘do gender’, thus challenging the fixed gender binary. Butler (1990) states: “gender is the repeated stylisation of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly regulatory frame that congeals over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (p. 33). Through ‘performativity’ this allows for a more fluid sense of identities than the fixed binary, and thus in acknowledging fluidity allows for the engagement of creating and (re)creating our gendered identities (Bradley, 2007). Through culture and ‘discourse’ our understanding of ourselves, our gender and sexuality is created and performed. For Butler (1990,) this is done through the ‘heterosexual matrix’; norms and practices bound to dominant notions of heterosexuality, “that constrain our ability to understand, act out and ‘do’ our gendered and sexual identities” (Ringrose, 2013: 70). Sexuality like gender is then viewed as complex, slippery, and contested.

Discourse and Subjectivity:

'Doing' gender and sexuality through performativity is structured then around repeated 'stylised' and discursive acts. Discourse is a broad concept that shapes what we are able to think and know; it shapes our thoughts, ideas, beliefs, values and identities. Discourse, defined by Foucault, refers to:

"ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and relations between them. Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the 'nature' of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern." (Weedon, 1987: 108).

Discourses are ways of giving meaning to our world (Gavey, 1989), they emerge out of relations of power from social institutions such as politics, the media, law, medicine, social welfare, education and in the organization of the family and work (Weedon, 1997); all are able to control the formation of knowledge. Discourse, power, and knowledge are therefore entwined and work together in creating hierarchies. These hierarchies produce dominant discourses that are considered truthful, normal, common sense or right, while other discourse is marginalized, stigmatized, and may be considered wrong or immoral. However, discourses, as well as institutional strategies of domination, are also sites of resistance, as suggested by Weedon (1997) "these institutional locations are themselves sites of contest and the dominant discourses governing the organization and practices of social institutions are under constant challenge" (p. 105). For Foucault (1978) discourse is bound up with power, however, power is not something that is possessed but as something exercised, therefore discourse; "transmits and produces power; it reinforces it but it also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it" (p.1). It is therefore argued that through discourse that we come to know and to be.

So, for post-structural theorists our sense of self is not an essential, unified, coherent entity. Rather, it is shifting, multiple and fragmentary (Weedon 1997), and it is within this framework, that our sense of ourselves is constructed; we position ourselves and are positioned by discourse (Gavey, 1989; St Pierre, 2000). Subjectivity refers then to "the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding

her relation to the world” (Weedon, 1997: 32). Bradley (2007) highlights the relationship between discourse and subjectivity:

“Subjectivity is discursively produced and is constrained by the range of subject positions defined by the discourses in which the concrete individual participates. In this sense existing discourses determine not only what can be said and understood, but the nature of subjectivity itself, what it is possible to be.” (p.66)

Through discourse we can craft what we are able to be, however, as well as positioning ourselves we are able to be positioned, raising the question of agency, structure and power.

Power and Agency:

Foucault theorised power as something that is not possessed, but rather ‘embodied and enacted’; ‘diffuse rather than concentrated’ something exercised; not wholly negative, but also a productive force; viewed as a process with power working through individuals; ‘discursive rather than purely coercive’ (Gaventa 2003: 2). Foucault (1980) positions power as functioning within a set of relationships; and ‘constitutes agents rather than being deployed by them’ (ibid); never absolute, and always accompanied by resistances. Foucault (1998) states that ‘Power is everywhere’ and ‘comes from everywhere’ (p. 63) so in this sense is neither an agency nor a structure. For Foucault (1991), power produces reality: ‘it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth’ (p.194).

Agency, like other terms discussed here can be described as a ‘slippery’ concept (Hitlin and Elder 2007) with the definition causing continuing conceptual and political difficulties for feminists (London Feminist Salon Collective, 2004). Agency has long been associated with ‘free will’; active striving and having power and influence over one’s life (Eteläpelto et al, 2013). ‘Free will’ can arguably act as a smoke screen however; it positions women as having choices, and as Baker (2008) argues:

“The lauding of choice acts as a decoy for domination and its role in concealing the operation of power cannot be understated. John Stuart Mill’s observation that men (except for the “most brutish”) prefer “not a forced slave but a willing one” (Mill, 1869, 2000, p. 22) takes on a modern relevance. Repressive dictates have been replaced by the active participation of women in assenting to the often-disadvantaging conditions of their lives.” (p.62).

Arguably the ability to determine one's own life is strongly influenced by broader social and political structures of power, and it is this push/ pull that is theoretically challenging. Post-structural and feminist theory, considering intersectionality, has challenged the notion of free will (Crenshaw, 1989: 141), and in giving recognition to structural power, both to its constraints, and its ability to enable agentic action allows agency to be understood as a discursive and fluid concept, rather than individually located and therefore open to possibility. Ahearn (2001) defines agency as "the socio-culturally mediated capacity to act" (p.112); whilst for Allen (2008) agency is 'a reworking of the conditions of existence ... not freedom from dominating forces but a double-edged process of submission and mastery' (p. 575). So that structure, agency and power are reciprocally generative, and Butler (1997) suggests that through 'discursive performativity', the subject is created through the productive power of discourse: 'discursive agency' (p.127).

Post-structural theory can arguably be complicated, and it is not conducive to 'everyday' practice or activist discussions, it has the potential to be elitist and alienating. It could be argued however, that it can also be interpreted and rendered accessible, to challenge and disrupt. As suggested by The Salon Collective (2004): "Such bridging may be necessary in order to learn from one another and help translate good theory to practice." (p.31). Feminist post-structural theory allows for resistance and (re)inscription, opening up the possibilities for political and social change: Although as Baker (2007) argues: "[t]he challenge for feminists is not an easy one. It is to address the continued subordination of women in an invigorated ideological climate which - most effectively - encourages its disavowal." (p. 63).

Feminist theory and domestic violence:

Here I move on to examine feminist theory in relation to domestic violence, and its positioning in the framework of second wave and poststructuralist feminism. First, I wish to pre-empt one of my major concerns in relation to domestic violence and feminist theory, that Bradley highlights as a concern to feminism per se. Bradley states her concern that, "many believe that the insights of modernity on gender remain vital and the revelatory and progressive thrust of feminist work is in danger of being lost in the post-modern moment" (2007: 59).

It is with this concern in mind that I wish to draw on and link the body of modernist feminist thought to post-structural theorising and how this coexistence is informative in relation to domestic violence and abuse, and how understanding young women's subjectivity created in dominant discourses of gender and relationships informs their performance in 'doing' gender and relationships in the context of DVA.

Radical feminism, with its refrain of 'the personal is political' (Millett, 1970) is considered to have politicised the personal experiences of women abused by their husband and partners. These concerns were not new as they drew on first wave feminist concerns and activism that subsequently saw laws passed such as in the 'UK Matrimonial Causes Act' in 1878 that made it possible for women in the UK to seek legal separation from an abusive husband (Abrams, 1999). However, the awareness raising advocated by second wave feminists supported in the (re)identification of domestic violence and enabled a reification that facilitated a theoretical and political debate, providing an understanding of the structural and cultural forces of the phenomenon, as well as the magnitude of the problem. The hugely influential work of Dobash and Dobash (1979) named and located domestic violence firmly on the feminist agenda and identified the gendered power dynamics within the institution of the family, societal and culture structures. As Wendt and Zannettino (2015) highlight:

"Dobash and Dobash (1980) named domestic violence as not only the means by which men control and oppress women but as the most brutal and explicit expression of patriarchal domination. They argued there are economic and social processes that operate directly or indirectly to support patriarchal domination and the use of violence against wives." (p. 18).

This highlights patriarchy as a very useful and appropriate concept in relation to the relentlessness of DVA and the abuse of gendered power. Patriarchy and violence are interlinked; therefore, positioning male power and entitlement as the key to domestic violence. Radical feminists have argued that male violence is at the heart of men's control over women and that the patriarchal structures of the state play a part in supporting and perpetuating (Hanmer & Saunders, 1984) male violence; privileging men. The state is implicated by its lack of support for women who are victims of domestic violence, with DeKeseredy, (2011) suggesting that the ideology of patriarchy offers the 'political and social rationale

for its own existence'. Therefore, as a consequence; "both men and women come to believe that it is natural and right that women be in inferior positions which explains domestic violence." (Wendt and Zannettino, 2015: 20). The notion that violence is a legitimate form of reprimand has a strong historical base (rule of thumb: British common law once held that it was legal for a man to chastise his wife in moderation) and this is deemed acceptable, due to men's 'right' to exercise authority and command obedience and deference from their partners.

Intimate relationships are the site and context in which domestic violence and abuse is played out and it is arguably this concept of 'intimate' that creates the conditions for the insidious and hidden conceptualisation of male domination and power. The questioning of intimate romantic relationships and what that means, and how it is played out in contemporary society is crucial in understanding the ongoing perpetuation of violence. It is also arguably the site which is the gauge of gender equality in society. As Winstok (2011) argues; domestic violence is the only gauge of equality necessary in society, as she states:

"Feminist scholars did not choose to research relationships that should be intimate in order to establish and demonstrate inequality by chance. Violence is an aggressive, harmful and rejected behavior that relies on a power imbalance between the harming and the harmed parties. As such, more than any other behavior, violence brings forth the most objectionable aspect of inequality. It is especially abhorrent in a relationship that should be, or allegedly is, intimate. ...All this considered, violence against women at home demonstrates the problem of gender inequality and discrimination at its utmost severity and makes redundant the need to establish and demonstrate the problem in other social contexts." (p.306).

I couldn't agree more. Feminist theorizing and activism of the second wave feminist movement placed women at the heart of the matter; a public matter; viewing male violence as a male choice. The act of empowerment and of 'giving voice' to women exposed the complexities of the 'hidden' phenomena and developed an emergent theoretical understanding. Feminist scholarship challenged the male-stream view that had omitted the voice of women as victim/survivor and countered 'the majority of theoretical frameworks that exclude blame or devalue women.' (Wendt and Zannettino, 2015: 23).

Radical feminist activism and awareness raising allowed women's personal experiences to be voiced and in so doing identified and named domestic violence, providing evidence to build theoretical explanations, providing evidence to demonstrate that domestic violence is a gendered phenomenon (Dobash & Dobash, 1980); this had a great impact on policy and practice. However, the social structural conceptualisation relied on the social categorisation of gender as a binary construction, positioning 'women' as a collective. As I have discussed above, the positioning of women as unitary and cohesive then falls into the essentialist trap. The challenge to feminist theory came from within feminism itself; women who did not feel that feminism spoke for or to them, so the ramifications of race, class and sexuality complexified and further undermined feminist thought based on an essentialist view of 'woman'. Feminism became fractured by 'intersectionality' (Crenshaw, 1989); the recognition and entanglement of overlapping or multiple positioning's related to other systems of oppression, domination, or discrimination that are both interrelated and bound together such as race, disability, sexuality, ethnicity and culture.

Intersectional analysis has been utilised as a tool with which to examine women's experiences of DVA in diverse cultures and communities and has shed light on the similarities and differences in women's experiences (Bograd, 1999; Pease and Rees, 2008; Zannettino, 2012), adding a level of intricacy to the debate. Intersectionality highlights the complex experiences that subjugate women in multidimensional ways. This establishes the interconnected nature affecting a plethora of women's embodied experiences of domestic violence and abuse, such as the availability of support and access to resources. Wendt and Zannettino (2015) argue however, that intersectionality is evocative of structural analyses of modernist feminist accounts of DVA (p.29); but arguably at the same time fails to put gender at the heart of the matter, which is THE fundamental issue at the heart of DVA.

The impasse in feminist theorising has arguably been ruptured by feminists working with post-structural insights in areas such as education, youth and popular culture, to productive affect. However, Wendt and Zannettino (2015) argue that few feminists have developed or applied post-structural insights to DVA; this appears to have been more due to the difficulties with theory

(Weedon, 1997; The Salon Collective, 2004), and to the arguments and explanations around power and its gendered conceptualisation. Wendt and Zannettino maintain that feminist theorising on domestic violence “has had such a heavy investment in the structural and gendered power arguments of modernist feminism.” (2015: 21). As I stated above, modernist feminist thinking was the vehicle by which domestic violence and abuse became reified and politicised, and I do not think that we need to reject modernist feminist thinking, but we do need to (re)examine DVA from alternative theoretical perspectives to scrutinise all options for the potential of change. Arguably the success in both the application of post-structural insights to other areas of culture and the impact of equality in these areas is located further along the gendered continuum in relation to DVA. The ‘gains’ in areas such as education, youth and popular culture arguably are at the visible end of the spectrum, with the hidden and entrenched gender violence at the other.

It could be argued that although feminism and poststructuralism are in ‘tension’ this also makes for a fruitful alignment, however, they have, as yet, to be been fully utilised in theorising DVA, therefore leaving it largely ‘underdeveloped’. Wendt and Zannettino (2015) highlight that “as a consequence [of the underdevelopment] current contestations between modernist and post-modernist understandings of the problem are built on very thin and shaky ground indeed.” (p. 31). This tension and ‘shaky ground’ arguably exists between modernist feminist theorising and the developments informed by post-structural theory; between the material and embodied experiences of women in contexts of domestic violence and abuse, as there is a need for a shift in theorising that can impact the possibilities for change. As Wendt and Zannettino (2015) argue:

“This tension exists particularly for domestic violence theory because feminists have respected the need to move away from generalisation or homogenisation of women’s experiences, but at the same time they have witnessed little or no shift in statistics that reflect domestic violence against women.” (p. 25).

The impact, prevalence and enduring nature of gender violence has continued and is arguably rising (Walby, 2016) and therefore in theorising and working within these tensions it is appropriate to draw on a range of theoretical positions in an attempt to make sense of domestic violence. On the one hand, the abuse

of femininity and the investment in gendered discourse and subject positions needs to be questioned. Whilst on the other, as Ramazanoglu and Holland argue: “[e]mbodiment, violence, institutionalized dominance, material resources, for example, produce experiences that are more than discourse or performativity” (2002: 126). I argue there is a need to work within these tensions; and not be constrained by the fear that ‘the revelatory and progressive thrust of feminist work is in danger of being lost in the ‘postmodern moment’ (Bradley, 2007: 59) as this limit’s possibilities for transformation. As (Butler, 2006: ix) posited:

“Contemporary feminist debates over the meaning of gender lead time and again to a certain sense of trouble, as if the indeterminacy of gender might eventually culminate in the failure of feminism. Perhaps trouble need not carry such a negative valance.”

I position myself as working within feminist and post-structural insights to inform a discussion and process rather than as a rule following exercise. Many feminists have embraced post-structural insights as the research by Wendt and Zannettino demonstrates this to be a fruitful alignment in relation to DVA in their examination of the discursive construction of gender across diverse communities of women. However, I would argue that they left a gap in not addressing a community of young women, and how they are discursively constructed, through the subject positions that are offered and drawn upon; this is the gap that will support feminist understandings and the gap I aim to address in my thesis.

Chapter Three: A review of the literature:

In this chapter I present a focused literature review in two sections: 'relationships', combining love, romance pregnancy and motherhood; and 'education'. The ideas presented here traverse multiple contexts; however, I see it as analogous to untangling twisted yarn; unravelling interwoven strands that weave throughout the thesis. As I outlined in my rationale in the introductory chapter, the intersectionality of gender and age present as factors that have a bearing on the experiences of relationships and DVA. This is then played out within the context of education. However, the role of education is complex, arguably providing a 'conducive context' for DVA to be learnt and to flourish, but also as the context to prevent DVA through both formal and informal mechanisms. In order to unravel this conundrum, I examine the broad literature of 'relationships', 'education' and their interconnections.

I start the first section of this chapter by examining dominant discourses of love and romantic relationships, what is already known about these concepts with which to locate the young women's experiences and understandings of DVA, this includes literature that relates to the discourses of pregnancy and motherhood and how this is constructed and performed in the context of domestic violence and abuse. In the second part of this review I examine both the broad and narrow role of education in addressing DVA.

Part one: Relationships: Love, romance, pregnancy and motherhood.

Relationship discourses: love and romance:

"Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it but it also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it. In like manner, silence and secrecy are a shelter for power, anchoring its prohibitions, but they also loosen its hold and provide for relatively obscure areas of tolerance." (Foucault 1978:101)

The quote by Foucault above encapsulates for me the complexities of DVA and contextualises the possibilities of the power of discourse to silence, but also its potentiality to be resisted and thwarted. Love is embedded in public discourse, simultaneously amorphous and definite; we are bombarded by inescapable

exemplifications. Love has many different meanings and understandings contingent on time, place and status; this leaves 'love' a slippery and contested concept, an all-encompassing yet ambiguous term. It can be argued that discourses around love and romantic relationships are gendered and deeply embedded in the everyday thereby rendering them invisible

It is a term applied to many types of relationships; Ancient Greek philosophers identified four forms of love: familial love, friendly love, romantic love and divine love, and these forms have been extended by both western and non-western thinkers (Nietzsche, De' Beauvoir, Sartre, Lao Tzu, Kierkegaard. This includes the notion of love as a spiritual meaning and its virtues have been extolled through religious texts for centuries. Love is suggested as incorporating a variety of emotional, mental and physiological states.

My focus of love here is specifically on 'romantic love'. Romantic love is gendered, and a dominant theme in the literature is that love is the basis for intimate relationships. I focus on debates around love and the availability of discourses; how scripts emerge for the performance and enactment of gendered love and the invisibility of abuse, in the name of 'love'. Love has been dealt with in a number of different ways, but often viewed as foundational and linked to gender (Wetherell, 1995; Jackson, 1993), and early writing on this shows different views expressed as both empowering (Radway, 1984; Illouz, 1997) and disempowering for women (Firestone, 1974; de Beauvoir; Smart, 1984). Later work on individualisation has emphasised the positive and independent nature of new relationships. Although, this has also been disputed, with some arguing that it can be seen through the same heteronormative framework.

Love as foundational:

Arguably love can be theorised as a social construct that like gender and sexuality is a way of organising society, reflecting social and cultural mores. It has been argued that love acts in a broad sense, to bind us to the existing social order (Jackson, 1993), so that romantic relationships are considered to be functional and foundational for the organisation of Western societies (Donavan & Hester, 2015). The necessity to form a romantic bond and be part of a pairing is situated as a 'natural' state of being, with cultural discourses and

social structures supporting this intrinsic conception. As Donovan and Hester (2015) argue; “the law, political ideologies and cultural mores, rules, values and expectations about how gender and sexuality are enacted give the lie to essentialist beliefs about love.” (p. 19). This essentialist ‘lie’ becomes foundational so that for young people reaching adolescence it is pivotal to becoming involved in romantic relationships and coupling and is therefore an integral part of the development and maturation of the young. The process from ‘falling in love’, to the performing of love; its parameters and manifestations are all culturally bound and informed by gender and sexuality. However, the foundational and functional basis of love is based on the premise of heteronormativity.

Feminism and Love:

Love has often been viewed in relation to gender relations and equality. Traditionally it has been seen contradictorily as both empowering and tying: debated by feminists as both salvation and the source of women’s oppression. It is argued that historically love played an important role in the emancipation of women; through the confluence of love and marriage it positioned women as having a greater choice in partners (Carter, 2013). Disapproval of extra-marital relationships positioned monogamy as a sign of true love, and arguably provided a secure base for the economic family unit; bound by love.

However, the collocation of love and marriage were viewed by modernist thinkers (Luhmann, 1986) as a ‘peculiarity’ of modern western societies. Jackson (1993) identifies Weber as being ‘unusual’ as the first pre-feminist to raise the possibility that “love might not be experienced in the same way by women and men and that it might involve the subjugation of women.” (p. 204). De Beauvoir advanced this criticism and it was taken up by the second wave feminist movement. Radical feminist critique of second wave feminism positioned love (even more so than marriage) as fundamental to patriarchy and the conceptualisation of women’s oppression (Firestone, 1974). This argument is based on expended time and energy on relationships; viewed as unequal and gendered; with women making by far the greater investment. As Jackson (1993) highlights:

“Women invest far more in love and that they give far more affection to men than they receive in return. This was not seen as part of women’s

nature, rooted in some essential way in the feminine psyche, but as a product of the material conditions of women's lives. Love was linked to women's search for a positive identity, a sense of themselves as valued, in a society which undervalues and marginalises them. (p. 205).

However, for Firestone (1974), love was the 'pivot of oppression for women—a holocaust, a hell, and a sacrifice'. Resonating with de Beauvoir, who argues that, given the unequal position of men and women, love becomes "a curse" that confines women in the feminine universe. For Smart (1984) too, love and marriage are bound as an aspect of 'patriarchy's ideological armament' through which women became 'hooked', reliant on relationships with men, and enter into an unfavourable legal contract that is 'marriage.'

Early modernist views, that love, and marriage supported women's early empowerment has been taken up by feminist viewing love as an agentic mechanism through which to construct a 'positive identity'. Illouz (1997) whilst agreeing that love may indeed be the cause of much misery, still theorises love as a position of transformation, agency and resistance. Pearce (1995) and Radway; (1991) also theorise that love is egalitarian and subversive and through 'narrativity' women, it is claimed, can 're-script' their lives and loves and through their everyday practices thereby allowing young women to exercise 'real agency' (Langhamer, 2007).

Debates in contemporary society around love have produced a range of perspectives, many with a cynical view; for Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) and Bauman (2003) love has come to take a more individualised form. This individualisation is perhaps part of the postmodern (or late) condition that is characterised by the fragmentation of traditional community and family bonds. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995, 2000) argue that due to the ever-changing nature of social values, relationships and family life have become more 'flimsy' and prone to 'unravelling'. Bauman goes further in his view in that love has become undone, 'liquefied'; the once solid and secure nature of romantic partnerships and family structures have been demolished. Giddens (1992) however, offers an alternative view of relationships in late modernity, suggesting that love is about choice and freedom, the 'pure relationship'; an ideal type where a relationship is based on sexual and emotional equality, with its continuity based on mutual satisfaction. This belief in equality between men and

women is underpinned by the narrative of complementary differences; equal but different, based on 'natural' gendered proclivities.

However, the impact of late modern theorists such as Giddens and Beck have been questioned and their influence and success need to be 'interpreted in the light of their role as amplifiers of the discourses of power' (Skeggs, 2004; Mulinari & Sandel, 2009). A reading of Beck and Giddens by Mulinari & Sandel (2009) through the lens of Butler's heterosexual matrix, for example, positions their thesis of individualisation as a reinvention of heterosexuality. As these authors suggest:

"... [t]hrough Butler, we have learnt that the heterosexual matrix is produced in theories in the most fundamental and taken-for-granted assumptions about how the subject is constituted... It is, in short, through the heterosexual love relationship that one becomes a subject, which is the same as becoming a man or a woman. Giddens defines sexuality as an instinct that in itself does not need to be problematized or examined. Instead, they re-produce the hetero-relationship, not only as the fundamental of society, but also as what will save the world." (p. 501).

I would argue however, that the way love is currently constructed is far from 'what will save the world' but is constructed to hide abuse and rather it underpins the global pandemic of gender violence. Therefore, not all would agree with the (re)interpretation of *hetero-relationships*, or with the thesis of individualisation, indeed some may read it as a discourse that exists rather than Giddens's suggestion of reality. Love as an expression of individualisation emphasises and shapes subject positions for women with social and political rhetoric around "equality" acting as a hiatus; leading young women in to a false sense of parity. Arguably women are faced with immense pressure to be concerned for the performance of self; to develop emotional 'resilience' even in the face of abuse; As Johnson & Lawler (2005) argue:

"Explanations for inequality come to inhere within the subjectivities of persons who are then marked as 'wrong' or 'right', 'deficient' or 'acceptable'. One recursive effect of this is that the language of psychology has come to replace a grammar of exploitation (Walkerline, 2003)". (p.4)

Despite the thesis of individualisation, the rehashing of heterosexuality and the pressure to be concerned with the invention of the self as 'right' and 'acceptable' with 'resilience' in the face of 'unravelling' and 'liquefying' relationships, these pressures do not seem to have eroded women's trust and

belief in love and romance, the norms of love and romance and the binding ties of heteronormativity still holding strong.

Love, gender and sexuality:

Many of the overriding post-feminist western discourses around love, romance and intimate relationships are gendered, as Donovan and Hester (2015) assert; “[d]ominant understandings of love in contemporary society construct love as heterosexual and feminised, yet with a trend toward the belief in equality between the sexes.” (p. 19). The dominance of heterosexuality privileges masculinity, however, the popular discourse is one of equality; for example, the notion that women and men are mutually compatible based on ‘natural’ gendered qualities that are complimentary and of equal value (epitomised by self-help books such as ‘men are from mars women are from Venus’). Women are positioned as ‘carers’ and, in this sense, responsible for relationships and emotional care; whilst men might be considered to be ‘in charge’ of decision making, even when that is the ‘decision to make no decision’ (Hester & Donovan, 2015).

The understandings of love can therefore be seen as gendered (Wetherell, 1995), positioning individuals with a feminine or masculine script with attached meaning; men are supposed to ‘do sex’ and women ‘do romance’ (Lloyd & Emery, 2000; Hayes, 2014). Positioning ‘relationships’ as feminine and ‘sex’ as masculine is supported by de Beauvoir who claimed: ‘the word love has by no means the same meaning for both sexes’ (1972: 652). Women are positioned to invest more in romantic love arguably having the effect of de-centring the self, placing the partner at the centre of the relationship. This results in discourses of self-abnegation, drawing on traditional gendered roles. Hayes (2014) also supports the view that discourses of love are gendered, as she states:

“The self-defeat, the sacrifice, the giving up of self is in our feminine collective dialogue, and it is like crack cocaine to us.... We tell ourselves that doing self-defeating things for a man is romantic.” (p. 12).

So, the traditional sexual script of love, deeply imbedded in popular discourse; ‘so familiar as to be accorded the status of common sense’ (Hare-Mustin, 1994), position men with an exigent sex drive. This locates men as initiators of sex, with a need that must be met, even if through aggression; and it is the woman’s role to meet those needs (Byers, 1996; Lloyd & Emery, 2000).

Romance and popular culture:

Due to the limited remit of this thesis I present aspects of popular culture that are pertinent to the discussion, but acknowledge that this is a very broad topic, so in essence it is to highlight the narratives shared with me. As proposed then, discourses delineate what it means to be a woman or man and provides a range of gender appropriate subject positions (Weedon 1999), and as discussed above, discourses around love and romantic relationships are gendered and deeply embedded in the everyday thereby rendering them invisible. The gendered nature of power within a relationship is then maintained through its invisibility, allowing its perpetuation through the normalising of male domination and abuse. Dominant discourses are underpinned and maintained by popular discourse drawn from and created by cultural medium; narratives informed by language, film, media, social media, novels, art etc. Jackson (1993) suggests that cultural narratives around love are not equally available to men and women, as she states:

“Being constituted as feminine involves girls in discourses of feeling and emotion, and more specifically the culture of romance, from which boys are more often excluded from which they also exclude themselves in order to construct a sense of their own maleness. It is through the medium of sexual bravado and conquest, not the language of romance, masculinity is asserted” (p. 214).

Jackson emphasises then that women and girls develop an emotional literacy from dominant narratives and feminine culture which ‘men rarely acquire’ (1993: 216). This positions men, or the male script as having ‘emotional disabilities’ which women, through their script as the one responsible for the emotion work, and as carer, can help overcome (Radway 1987).

The fairy tale romance:

Fairy tales are narratives that have been shaped over centuries of retelling and have achieved a basic narrative form that is a distillation of human experience (Jones, 2002). On this basis the fairy tale has created enduring narratives that provide an assemblage of gendered scripts; although epitomised by the hero of ‘prince charming’ and the heroine ‘princess’. The basic premise of the fairy tale is that through adversity, good wins over evil and with a bit of magic, the prince charming or ‘the knight in shining armour’ saves the princess and they ride off in

to the sunset to live 'happily ever after'. There have been variations on the theme, from Grimm tales to Disney, along with feminist (re)tellings.

The traditional fairy tale was often a moral tale sometimes quite grotesque and although they were called "Children's Tales", they were not regarded as suitable for children. The fairy tale has become more idealistic over time, simultaneously, a tale of 'unusual happiness', and as a 'tall tale' that could not possibly be true. Nonetheless, it is the 'unusual happiness' that is the focus; rare, to be desired and strived for, that has an intensely powerful and eternal grip on how to 'do' romantic relationships. As Rowe (1979) states, fairy tales: "transmit romantic conventions through the medium of popular literature... Traditional fairy tales fuse morality with romantic fantasy in order to portray cultural ideals for human relationships." (p. 237). Wood (2001) conducted twenty in-depth interviews with heterosexual women who had been in violent romantic relationships and found that all the women narrated their experiences by drawing on 'western cultures primary gender narrative' that relied on "romance narratives – which entailed both fairy tale and dark romance narratives" (p. 1). Wood's argument is cogent in that in order for people to make sense of themselves and their lives they narrate stories for coherence; therefore, children's fairy tales provide 'early tutelage in the central romance narrative in which Prince Charming rescues a damsel in distress (poisoned princess, unloved step daughter) and the two live happily ever after.'" (Wood, 2001: 242). These principal love stories are 'bolstered' by the media and popular literature. This insidious and enduring popular discourse positions romantic love with 'unusual happiness' and has little resistance in which young women can make sense of their experiences that more fully reflect the 'tall tale'.

In research undertaken by Chung (2005) to address the dearth of research on DVA in young people's relationships and to adopt an alternative theoretical framework to those of 'Attachment Theory' and 'Social Learning Theory', she found through forty interviews that young people drew on discourses of heterosexuality, individualism and equality. Chung (2005) identified that it was 'romantic love' as an institution of heterosexuality, "that has a powerful influence on how young women attribute meaning to their experiences in dating relationships. The dominance of romantic love in Western society makes it inescapable for young women." (2005: 449). Romantic love 'diverts attention'

away from controlling behaviour that becomes (re)inscribed as signs of love and commitment. This is enabled as it is set against a backdrop of individualism that allows for young women to interpret young men's behaviour in ways evocative of the 'knight in shining armour, as intimacy and love, rather than 'signs of power and control'. The supremacy of romantic love in Western society appears to be inexorable.

Disney: love and the Disney Princess

In contemporary culture 'Disney' is considered a major capitalist venture that has insidiously permeated the foundational dominant discourses of romantic love in Western society. It is the Disney princess that has come to symbolise the fairy tale dream identity. It provides powerful scripts for girls and young women with which to narrate their lives. Much of the research has shown how Disney reinforces traditional gender roles (Bell, Haas, & Sells, 1995; Giroux & Pollock, 2010), and despite an attempt at a more empowered version of femininity and attracting acclaim for its gender representation, films such as 'Frozen' and 'Moana' provide only the slightest change in the script for the empowerment of women. The main female characters in Frozen maintain traits that are deemed as essential for "doing" femininity correctly; as Jafar (2014) identifies, 'they are not aggressive'; they must learn 'to put others first' to 'be selfless'; all whilst 'looking beautiful'. The lead male character in Frozen however, 'embodies a rugged masculinity very much in line with dominant ideals—white, powerful, independent, and physically strong' (Jafar, 2014). These gendered roles appear to serve up the standard version of Disney romance. The more modern princess 'Moana' (in the film of the same name) was hailed as a departure from the standard princess and provided an opportunity for an alternative approach, and debatably attempted to do so by removing the romantic distraction (Dunsmore, 2017), however, this opportunity to provide an alternative narrative of gender was not taken. Moana perpetuates gendered scripts found in other Disney princess films (Coyne et al, 2016), implicating that 'females' humanity continues to be characterized by passivity, while female activity; namely wielding power, is linked to 'monstrosity' (Streiff & Dundes, 2017: 9). Some may argue that Disney has come a long way in relation to love, romance and femininity and has introduced newer, more female empowering scripts. Arguing, for example, that Frozen and Moana allow more

possibilities for young women – e.g. as independent, not just in the pursuit of love, as valuing female friendship and family in the same way as romantic relationships, as pursuing their own goals and as heroines...however, some scholars have questioned how far this goes and whether these scripts still get re-inscribed in the traditional ways (Streiff & Dundes, 2017).

Whilst there can be many and varied readings and interpretations of fairy tales, the princess is an enduring gendered script that offers the message that ‘princesses are the best’; however, her best asset is her physical appearance. A princess is always in a state of ‘becoming’; she needs to become a queen, to find love, for ‘the happily ever after’. So, in essence these stories are about females finding fulfilment through love, and that they need a man/relationship to help them be fulfilled. This ‘princess’ message is presented everywhere and makes it difficult for girls and young women to reject. In a longitudinal study Coyne et al (2016) found girls were much more likely than boys to “engage with Disney Princesses ...furthermore, higher princess engagement was associated with increased female gender-stereotypical behaviour” (p. 1921). Arguably this leads to a relatively recent phenomena; the princess complex, suggesting that girls want to live a fairy tale life through obsessing about their looks; the role of social media and celebrity possibly heightens the cultural impact of the concept of ‘princess’. Evidence for this can be found in the range and volume of princess goods in shops, princess parties and princess makeovers. The recent phenomenon of the ‘unicorn’ in popular culture, although its symbolism is complicated it is arguably part of the princess genre, that can ‘represent sacred and romantic love’ (Wood, 2017).

Research by Dinella (2013) found that grown women who self-identified as “princesses” ‘were less likely to want to work’; ‘gave up more easily on a challenging tasks’ and were ‘more focused on superficial qualities. These findings suggest that gendered scripts in childhood, such as the princess discourse may impact on gender narratives in later life. As Davies (1989) found from research with pre-school aged children; gendered identities are taken up within the constraints of narrative structures that impact on the way’s children came to understand available storylines. Davies observed that:

“children could not necessarily understand feminist stories because their hearings were informed by dominant discourses of gender. It is the

power of those dominant discourses to trap children within conventional meanings and modes of being.” (1992: 1).

In subsequent follow up research, Davies (1992) was surprised to find that there was continuity to the storylines that children applied to their lives, even when their lived experiences were more varied, discontinuous and fragmented, as she highlights:

“it would seem that the children use the same (known, familiar) storylines to pull out the same threads over time and thus to constitute themselves as persons with continuity. However, their preferred storylines and the cumulative experience of being positioned within those storylines in consistent ways enables them to tell stories that give the sense of a consistent and continuous person. That sense of continuity and stability in turn gives them a sense of control over their lives.” (p. 23).

Dominant discourses, saturated with cultural scripts of love and romance locate young women so that they ‘do’ relationships as a gendered performance, maintaining and sustaining what it means to be a woman. So arguably, even though Davies identified ‘children’ were unable to ‘hear’ and understand feminist (re)working of fairy stories ‘*because their hearings were informed by dominant discourses of gender*’; this may be applicable to older children and teenagers. The ‘threads’ of continuity in children’s narratives support their sense making and the ability to enact agency through this continuation; this may then also be applicable through to adulthood. Arguably, this is what continues for young women entering their first relationships, that although romantic relationships are individually experienced, they are part of the culture, ‘by taking on this paradigm, individuals affirm their place in society as well as support their culture’ (Lloyds & Emery, 2000). The fairy tale is ubiquitous; and it appears to hold huge enduring power, arguably through Disney, children’s literature and social cultural and economic adoptions, that are then sustained and reinforced by teen fiction, social and cultural media, celebrity and the commodification of ‘princess’.

Abuse:

It could be argued then that discourses of love have such a powerful and enduring hold in contemporary society, and these underpin the supporting narratives that enable and sustain their domination; As Lloyd & Emery (2000) argue:

“Like the discourse of romance, the discourse of sexuality can easily be used to excuse his behavior (“He could not control his urges”) and blame the victim (“She led him on,” or “She should have known that’s how men are”).” (p. 13).

Arguably the perpetrator excusing and victim blaming discourses become difficult to resist or reject; so, although romance and sex are juxtaposed, they are bound by the discourse of love, and this powerful discourse serves to obscure inequality and abuses through ‘love’ as shared and equal. Research by Jackson (1982) and Lees (1986) identified that sex, especially for young women may be ‘bound up’ with understandings of love, as they state:

“Sexual relations are, for young women in particular, still fraught with anxieties about sexual exploitation... In this context ‘love’ serves to validate sexual activity morally, aesthetically and emotionally. An act which might otherwise be characteristic of a ‘slag’ was transformed into something beautiful, magical and pleasurable.” (Jackson, 1982: 210).

This gendered context of inherent complementarity positions masculinity as being in charge: the decision maker who sets the parameters for the relationship, and subsequently positioning the other as the caretaker (femininity), for the partner and the relationship who ‘enacts emotion work’ (Donovan & Hester, 2015). This therefore positions a person who uses control or violence as justifiable if they are pursuing their ‘right’ to be the decision maker (Donovan & Hester, 2015), and in control of the relationship. This is attached to dominant forms of masculinity and a subject position that draws on a sense of entitlement through the discourse of romantic love.

This heteronormative discourse therefore places women in a subordinate role and normalises male control; thereby legitimising dominance and abuse by men (Chung, 2005; Jackson, 2001; Wood, 2001; Lloyd & Emery, 2000; Hayes, 2014). The cultural construction of love as gendered and individualised therefore positions love as woman’s responsibility and domain whilst maintaining sex as the masculine domain. Although these roles are arguably inherently gendered and heteronormative, Donovan & Hester (2015) found that regardless of gender and sexuality domestic violence is enacted and experienced in very similar ways, it is rather the uptake of gendered scripts than one’s gender. These gendered scripts are powerfully reinforced and perpetuated by cultural representations; as Power et al (2006) point out, “[a]lthough popular media scripts are overwhelmingly heteronormative, the ideal

of romantic love is not specific to sexual orientation. The romantic script is, however, highly gendered.” (p. 177).

Love and DVA:

So, how does all this relate to DVA and where do these fairy-tale discourses fit in? At first sight they may seem entirely unrelated, with love; romantic relationships and domestic violence offered as socially and culturally juxtaposed. However due to the gendered nature of romance scripts infused by popular culture with the centrality of the fairy tale and inherent power differential in its heteronormativity, there is a complex entanglement, where DVA is constructed, performed and (re)enacted through love.

Research has demonstrated that it is very much related and suggests (Wood, 2001: Hayes, 2014) that when ‘problems’ present within a relationship and the fairy tale narrative is struggling to be maintained there are a number of ways that young women may try to make sense of this. However, still drawing on understandings from the fairy tale narrative; as emphasised by Hayes, love is employed as a tool that can be wielded to triumph over adversity. As Wood highlights “[t]he fairy-tale narrative does not preclude problems, but it does maintain that love can conquer any hardship.” (2001: 250). Through research with women who had been in violent relationships Wood (2001) found that participants relied on romance narratives to make sense of violence in these relationships. She states their rationale:

“[N]arratives are sought with particular fervor when experience feels chaotic and seems not to make sense... experience becomes incoherent when romantic relationships do not adhere to the central romance narratives... Thus, they [women] are motivated to discover some way to make sense of what is not sensible: the simultaneity of professed love and enacted violence” (p. 242).

Wood established that the women in her research found ways in which to reconcile the incoherence experienced in the relationship, but still through the interpretation of the fairy-tale narrative, as DVA is ‘entirely compatible with the fairy tale view of romance’ (2001: 243). This compatibility of the fairy tale narrative arguably combines the tale of ‘unusual happiness’, and the ‘tall tale’ that could not possibly be true. The trope of adversity, that relationships are difficult sometimes, but you need to ‘stand by your man’ positions narratives such as ‘the good outweighs the bad’ and its ‘not that bad’ or ‘not as bad as it

could be' become epithets to journey through the adversity of DVA. Women are located to be responsible for romantic relationships and therefore should then do all they can to please their man, in order to 'control' or stop the DVA. Prince Charming can also be a toad so that 'it is not the real him', excusing his abusive behaviour due to alcohol, drugs, stress, money worries, abuse in childhood and the disclosing of 'fragile selves' (Donovan and Hester, 2015) that complicates gendered scripts in abuse. Many women who stay in abusive relationships, or return to them, cite love, loyalty and commitment as their main motives (Karan and Keating 2007; Donovan and Hester, 2010; Hayes, 2014).

Prince (c)harming: The discourse of (dis)enchantment

When the discourse of romantic love can no longer be sustained by the fairy tale narrative, and love and abuse become incoherent, research shows that an alternative is sought to support understanding and assimilate 'professed love and enacted violence'. Wood found that women drew on a narrative of the 'dark romance'; one that constructs violence and abuse as 'typical, or 'normal' that are 'culturally legitimated' (2001: 253). The dark romance discourse is supported through ubiquitous social and cultural influences; film, music, television, literature, art and popular magazines. Through this edifice Hayes argues that "the social construction of romantic love suggests that there is a fine line between love and hate." (2014: 62). The complex interweaving of love and hate normalise abusive behaviours, as epitomised by fairy tales and its continuity into many cultural narratives, as Hayes points out regarding Disney; 'seemingly innocuous storylines and characters idealize pain, tragedy and sacrifice as necessary and acceptable components of romantic love.' (2014:50).

The dark romance discourse is enabled then, through supporting narratives; these narratives draw on wider gendered heterosexual scripts. Taking care of the relationship is positioned as part of the feminine script and is maintained by the supporting narrative of 'I love him'. So that no matter what he does; love can conquer all. It can be argued that the 'normalisation' of violence is embodied by dominant masculinity and enabled and sustained by the discursive practices around the gendered perpetration of violence; such as 'boys will be boys'. This position the perpetration of violence relating to jealousy from male ownership as justifiable; constructed as a profound feeling of love, as Power et al (2006) highlight:

"[b]ehaviours associated with romantic love have similarities to extreme possessiveness such as constant attention, numerous daily telephone calls, jealousy, exclusion of pre-existing friendships, and driving to and collecting from work and are often associated with a sign of the depth of love" (p.177).

Research has found that possessive and controlling behaviours are distorted so that they are performed and understood as love and commitment (Wood 2001; Fraser 2008; Power et al.2006; Donovan and Hester 2011; Hayes, 214). Gendered scripts of sexual violence also have the power to be constructed not as an act of violence but as a result of overwhelming love and desire (Jackson, 1993: 17).

Victim blaming:

Dominant discourses are employed and deployed with possessive and controlling behaviours distorted and (re)signified as love, thereby excusing the aggressor. This then arguably, through gendered and heterosexualised micro regulation, apportions blame to the victim. The process of gendering the blame is enabled by positioning women as responsible for the care and maintenance of the relationship and the partner, and that ANY relationship is better than no relationship. A woman needs a man; it creates a sense of worth and gendered identity through the performance of compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1996). Research suggests that many women feel trapped in a relationship, both in a literal and metaphorical sense. The performance of gendered micro practices is inevitably bound up in the heterosexual performance of a relationship and women may be too invested in the relationship, or the belief that no one else will have them, and will mean a loss of self; positioning the relationship as the principal purpose of a woman's existence (Fraser 2005: 17). As Power et (2006) al state: 'the desire to be loved, and to love romantically is pivotal to understandings of self as properly feminine subjects' (p.183). Therefore, the loss of love can have a huge impact on a women's sense of identity, as Lloyd and Emery point out:

"Although romance is supposed to be highly individual, it is also part of the culture, and, by taking on this paradigm, individuals affirm their place in society as well as support their culture. When we fall out of love or the relationship ends, the feelings of distress may have root in the loss of the paradigm or concept of love and romance as much as in the loss of a person or relationship." (2000: 12).

Arguably it is a fear of the loss of the relationship, when a woman has had her sense of self so eroded by an abusive relationship that what is left of her identity is bound up in the relationship and therefore the fear or threat of a loss of the relationship is interpreted as a total loss of self. The emotion work in a relationship falls to women, or the female gender script, so that if the relationship is not working, through the context of DVA, then a woman may blame herself (Wood, 2001; Fraser, 2005; Power et al. 2006; Hayes, 2014). As Hayes (2014) points out: 'Women often believe that if they just try harder, love more, or be a more worthy person, then the abuse will stop because they will no longer be deserving of it' (p. 69). This is a powerful and enduring narrative that supports the dominant discourse positioning women as to blame for their experiences of domestic violence and abuse; the lens of blame is firmly fixed on women to be responsible for abuses perpetrated against them, supported by women's own understandings of responsibility and culpability.

The person responsible for the violence and abuse hides behind the gendered lens of romantic love and is often vindicated, adding to the misplacing of accountability. Lloyd & Emery (2000) highlight that through popular culture a form of 'linguistic avoidance' enables male perpetration and female victimization, by the use of 'fuzzy' terms. The media do not report DVA for what it is; even when the details of the case are disclosed there is no naming of domestic violence and abuse. For example (there are many) the Mirror newspaper (Evans, 29.06.2017) printed a story and described a young woman being locked in a car with her partner and having her throat slit as a 'domestic dispute', supporting the 'fuzzy' nature of reporting that constructs a 'dispute'; an argument or disagreement when what happened was in fact a DVA homicide. Drawing on Meyers (1997) Lloyd & Emery further highlight the media's gendered lens:

"the news media tend to dichotomize women who have been beaten, raped, or murdered by intimate partners into good girls versus bad girls, with the result that unless she was totally helpless (i.e., too old or too young to fight back), she is represented as somehow responsible for the attack" (2000:21).

This gendered individualisation of blame and responsibility provides a narrative for 'patriarchal resistance' where the dominant discourse and solution to DVA is for the woman to 'just leave', or to fix herself as she has failed to fix him. A

classic form of binary understandings of women; women can only ever be seen in this light, reminiscent of the 'slut/ angel' binary. Victims/ survivors are then positioned in discourse as being held to account. As Berns (2001) argues:

"The dominant focus on victims' needs, syndromes, stories, and responsibility obscures the root causes of domestic violence. People may be shocked by the explicit blame put on the victims in many men's and political magazine articles. However, most women's magazine articles do the same." (p. 278).

Research shows that blaming the 'victim/ survivor' for their experiences of violence and abuse is endemic, supported and perpetuated by dominant cultural forms, that infuse gendered scripts and the gendered performance of relationships and rules that direct these scripts.

Gender and relationship rules in DVA:

Rules in a relationship complexify the understanding of love and the nature of abuse. Indeed, Donovan and Hester (2015) propose that 'practices of love', emphasise and strengthen relationship rules in an abusive relationship. As they explain:

"love can act to confuse victims/survivors about how to make sense of and name their experiences as DVA. What we call practices of love, then, underpin and reinforces relationship rules in abusive relationships: the relationship is for the abusive partner and on their terms and that the victim/survivor is responsible for the care of the abusive partner and the maintenance of the relationship" (p.121).

Imperceptible changes over time in relationship rules dictated by the abusive partner can change the meaning of love, and abuse can go unrecognised by the victim/ survivor. Gendered practices can also be engaged in order to confuse and distort the nature of power in the relationship. As Donovan and Hester highlight from their extensive research that looked at comparisons of DVA in same sex and heterosexual relationships, they found:

"For example, abusive partners propensity to disclose 'fragile' cells (which is more associated with femininity) can act to position victims/survivors as emotionally stronger (more associated with masculinity) than their abusive partners." (2015:121).

This can twist and obscure where power may hide in the DVA context. The woman is then positioned as 'saviour' or 'rescuer'; responsible for his behaviour, and this is reinforced through supporting narratives of affection, acting as a

perpetuating mechanism and buttress to the discourses of love. Relational gender differences can then be used to underpin relationship rules by viewing gender differences as 'ingrained'; inequalities are no longer problematic because each partner is doing what they are 'best suited' for (Hare-Mustin, 1994). This 'myth of equality' is arguably part of the individualistic post-feminist terrain locating women as autonomous, having a 'choice' in their relationships; their experience of abuse, and the choice to stay or leave a violent, abusive relationship. Chung (2005) found, through forty interviews with young people (25 young women and 15 young men) aged 15 to 19; that the institutions and practices of heterosexuality were the core for identifying how gender inequality, violence and abuse were 'reproduced, ignored, marginalised or given meaning'; and that the discourse of equality was used to explain their intimate relationships, as she states:

"The individualistic discourse supports young women's rights to choose to stay or leave a relationship. However, it also dictates that should she remain in an abusive relationship that it is her 'choice' to do so as she is an individual of free will, with the social context (gendered power relations) not taken into account. In total, this leaves gendered power relations relatively intact as they are invisible within an individualistic discourse which further masks the effects of gender inequality." (2005: 453).

The individualistic discourse that construct individual women as having rights and choices, arguably disguises the enactment of agency and the freedom of choice in situations of DVA. So young women are positioned as having a choice over their experience when the experience of abuse is hidden by a veneer of love and often it is only after the relationship has ended that the façade is removed and an understanding of the experience as abuse is understood as such and then disclosed. This is arguably a constraining dominant discourse, although this may not be the case for all women allowing for the possibility of doing things differently.

DVA and Sexuality:

So how does sexuality impact on love and gendered relationship rules in relation to domestic violence? Research suggests (Chung, 2005; Hester & Donovan, 2009; Donovan and Hester, 2015) that regardless of sexual orientation young people's sexual identities are formed within the institution of

heterosexuality (Chung; 2005). It is arguably through this institution that discourses of love are performed by young people and gendered scripts are enacted regardless of gender. Donovan and Hester's research findings on DVA and same-sex relationships demonstrate that DVA can be experienced in 'similar ways across same sex sexualities. This is also underpinned by relationship rules, as discussed above, as Donovan and Hester state:

"The fact that they [rules] are enacted by partners in same-sex relationships as well suggest that it is not the gender of the partner to a relationship per se that necessarily defines which role they will inhabit. Rather, we suggest that it is dominant scripts about how (heterosexual) relationships might be lived that influences and shapes the relationship dynamic." (2015: 121).

In terms of variances in experiences of DVA and same sex relationship Donovan and Hester found that there were:

"clear differences by gender; physical violence and physically coercive sexual violence was more typically used by male perpetrators, whether their partners were female or male...In contrast, abusive partners in female same sex relationships more typically used emotional violence and emotionally coercive sexual violence...Gendered norms are therefore important in understanding both heterosexual and same sex DVA." (2015: 196).

Research by Hayes (2014), (as well as her auto ethnography as a woman in a same sex abusive relationship) concurs with Donovan and Hester and suggests the similarities of women, whether in a heterosexual or same sex relationship, in terms of DVA are highly significant. Hayes (2014) argues that the level of trust, respect and equality in a relationship is a reflection of the degree in which "we have bought the heteronormative discourse of romantic love. I would argue that this applies equally to same-sex couples as it does to heterosexual ones." (2014: 27). So, although heteronormativity infuses popular discourse, the model of romantic love is more ambiguous, although, as Power et al state "the romantic script is...highly gendered" (2006: 177). Therefore, these norms appear to be dominant regardless of relationship and sexual orientation, and these scripts look like they are all encompassing for young people.

Pregnancy & Motherhood:

“motherhood is a gendered dance and through the dance we are gendered”

(Lorber, 2010: 245)

As well as love, pregnancy and motherhood, as embodied experiences of gendered heterosexualised relationships are intertwined with young women's experiences of relationships in the context of DVA. Pregnancy and motherhood are dominant themes in the DVA research literature, highlighting the lack of reproductive autonomy as a pertinent factor that young women contend within abusive relationships further complexifying their experiences. There are unique factors that impact on women who are pregnant or whom become mothers in the context of DVA and this I would argue is further impacted by age. The risk of domestic violence and abuse are compounded and result in higher risk following pregnancy, birth and for women with children (Taft, 2002; Buchanan, Power & Verity, 2013). The literature suggests that there is a very strong and complex relationship between women, pregnancy and abuse that is rooted in gender inequality. Women are three times more likely to be injured when pregnant (Humphreys, 2007), as pregnancy is often a trigger point for the onset of abuse and where abuse exists prior to pregnancy there is an escalation in the violence. Where abuse is already being perpetrated, research shows that gender inequalities impact on a young woman's autonomy over sexual intimacy (Coy et al, 2010) and her choice of contraception; there is also little or no choice around the continuation or termination of a pregnancy, or of maintaining the position of the child's primary carer.

The impact of DVA is multifaceted with high levels of antenatal psychosocial stress significantly associated with depression, panic disorder, drug use, domestic violence, (Woods, et al 2010:61). DVA during pregnancy has further implications; not only does it makes a woman more vulnerable, but it puts her unborn child in danger. DVA increases the risk of miscarriage, infection, premature birth, low birth weight, foetal injury and foetal death (Bailey, 2010). The impact of DVA on a child once born can be long-lasting and devastating; including physical, developmental, psychological and behavioural effects, and the impact of trauma and developmental regression (Bromfield et al, 2010). The role of motherhood and the child/children can be utilised as weapons of abuse; tactics that are employed to further undermine the woman and the relationship

she has with her child or children (Radford & Hester, 2006: Hardesty & Chung, 2006: Lapierre, 2010; Wendt & Zannettino, 2014).

Discourses of Motherhood:

“Motherhood holds multiple and contradictory meanings for women who mother. The experience of motherhood often involves fulfilment, joy, and a sense of accomplishment as well as a sense of inadequacy, resentment, and anger—sometimes simultaneously, sometimes at different points in time. However, motherhood is rarely presented in its full complexity. Instead, two dichotomous and coherent images of mothers dominate in our culture: the good mother and the bad mother” (Semaan et al 2013: 70).

Motherhood and mothering have been much debated, and the essentialist notions challenged by feminists positioning both concepts as socially, historically and politically constructed. Both terms have been challenged and although ‘motherhood is female’, ‘mothering need not be’ (Silva, 1996). Although this separates the biological and the social, both can be viewed as social constructions. Silva (1996) suggests that they have become intertwined terms due to “men’s increasing capacity to control mothering and the progressive devaluation of mothering.” (p. 13). This arguably intensified through the twentieth century, as the bonds of the triad; love, marriage and motherhood have been eroded. At the beginning of the twentieth century the three were intertwined, with an expectation that women would and should become mothers; however only within the bound of marriage, as Silva (1996) states “[m]arriage and motherhood were supposed to be synonymous, and they were regarded as the best achievement for women of both working and middle class.” (p. 16). The stigma of unmarried mothers was intense, and that construction has arguably persisted throughout the twentieth century. Challenges to the construction of motherhood and mothering came from the advent of the women’s movement and reproductive technologies, resulting in greater for autonomy and choice. Arguably there has been the realisation that ‘mothering can increasingly be done without men’ (Silva, 1996: 20).

Although the construction of motherhood has possibly become more fluid, encompassing a range of experiences; dominant regulatory discourses prevail around a mothering ideology based on ‘intensive’ mothering, as Maätita (2010) identifies, this involves:

“a strong sense of devotion between those who mother and those who are mothered, with mothers putting their charge's needs first. Another element of the intensive mothering ideology requires that women lavish copious amounts of energy, time, and money in raising their children. [also] intensive mothering ideology holds that child rearing is more important than paid work.” (p.3).

The ideology of intensive mothering affects how women come to understand what it means to be a “good” mother. Discourses surrounding women as mothers are powerful and pervasive constructing mothers as the ultimate expression of the female role. Conversely a woman who is not a mother is often constructed as unfulfilled, empty or barren (Bradley, 2013), and is therefore failing to perform her gendered script. McNay, (1992) argues that the mother–child dynamic is set up as the ‘ultimate paradigm of natural caring relationships’ therefore roles of ‘woman’ and ‘mother’ overlap resulting in a dominant construction of woman that is ‘dependent on the concept of mother’. Discourses of motherhood and practices of mothering are similarly gendered and deeply embedded in our society and therefore rendered invisible, so that ‘doing motherhood’ is also ‘doing gender’.

Research shows that the discourses of motherhood are multiple and multifaceted, however these variations broadly fall on a continuum between the ‘good mother’ and the ‘bad mother’ with the multiple variations dominated by the dichotomy as the quote by Semaan et al (2013) above argues. The ‘good mother’ draws on the gendered cultural scripts of an idealised femininity that constructs mothers to be caring, nurturing, enduring, instinctive and devoted (Humphreys, 2010; Semaan: 2013). On the other hand, discourses of mothering also offer women the opposite subject positions. The bad mother is characterised by being selfish, neglectful and non-caring. The ‘good mother’/ ‘bad mother’ dichotomy makes mothering in the context of domestic violence and abuse highly problematic with the available dominant discourses almost impossible to resist or reject. This also fails to provide an understanding of experience and therefore restricts the paradoxical practise of motherhood and its narration.

The construction of the ‘good mother’ is centred on protection, nurture and care, therefore the discourse of ‘failure to protect’ it could be argued might be considered performative. So, women in this context are constructed as ‘bad

mothers', supported by the victim/mother/ self-blaming discourses; the 'good mother' discourse is juxtaposed as antithetical in this context. Mullender et al (2002: 157) argue that motherhood in the context of DVA is constructed in such a way that women are "doomed to fail," and in this context an environment is created that is "deeply unconducive to achieving even 'good enough' mothering" (Mullender, 2002: 157). Women are constructed as having the primary responsibility for children and in the case of DVA they are expected to provide children with a safe environment regardless of the man's responsibility in perpetrating the abuse (Humphreys and Absler, 2011); they are held to account for harms they did not commit. So, for mothers in violent and abusive circumstances they have a 'burden of responsibility' ... "whereby they are expected to reach a higher standard of parenting than women in non-violent environments." (Wendt & Zannettino, 2015: 40). The regulatory discourses of mothering place responsibility for the protection and care of children firmly with mothers. This gendered lens inflexibly positioned towards mothers' obscures scrutiny of the fathers' roles and responsibility; arguably normalising and legitimising men's abuse. As Radford and Hester's (2006) quote summarises:

"the individualization of responsibility for crime and victimization has provided a cultural and political context in which mother blaming can flourish and perpetrators 'disappear'. Women who are abused are sometimes seen by the police, child protection and the courts as responsible for their own victimization." (p. 38).

I would argue that age then intersects to further complexify the situation and the socio-cultural and structural response to young women as mothers in DVA contexts.

Young mother = bad mother?

The intersection of age arguably compounds an already detrimental and confining discourse. Women in the context of DVA are constructed as 'bad mothers' for their failure to protect their children, despite the range of agentic strategies women employ to keep both their children and them safe from the abuses perpetrated against them (Radford and Hester, 2006). The layers of intersectionality add to the complexity of the available discourses within which women as mothers can perform. Arguably, pregnancy and motherhood are considered to be part of the standard or conventional aspect of a woman's life cycle. However, for teenage mothers, pregnancy and motherhood is often

constructed as a social problem (Whitely and Kirmayer, 2008; Bonell, 2011). As Graham and McDermott (2005) state, “[i]ntegral to UK discourse is the assumption that early motherhood is problematic, and is problematic because it both epitomises and produces social exclusion”(p. 32). Whilst there is acknowledgement of violence and abuse in young mothers relationships (Department for Children Schools and Families and Department for Health, 2010), Wood and Barter (2014) point out that “no detail is given to show an appreciation of the complex issues faced by pregnant teenagers and teenage mothers experiencing violence in their relationships and how they can be supported” (p.565).

In a review of quantitative research from the USA and the UK, Bonell (2011) examined why teenage pregnancy is conceptualized as a social problem; the findings suggest that the conceptualisation is largely because of the harm it causes to the health and/or well-being of the women and children affected through social and material resources. However, whilst evidence was presented to support these ideas Bonell (2011) states:

“this cannot be regarded as a direct and inevitable effect of pregnancy or motherhood. Rather, it is one mediated by, and contingent on, how society responds to teenage mothers and their children via health and social care, education, training and welfare provision.” (p.269).

This is arguably a moral judgement based on social class and expected neoliberal trajectories; the ‘yummy mummy’ as opposed to the ‘scummy mummy’. Tyler (2008) points out that; “[t]he “chav mum” is produced through disgust reactions as an intensely affective figure that embodies historically familiar and contemporary anxieties about female sexuality, reproduction, fertility, and “racial mixing.”” (p. 17). This positioning then of young mothers problematises them as the antipathy of the ‘yummy mummy’; unmarried (Bonell, 2011) therefore without a male provider. They are therefore branded as a burden on the state; leading to social exclusion and stigmatisation which acts as a boundary enforcer for the correct performance by young women. This stigmatisation serves to punish young women (Whitely and Kirmayer, 2011) as the role of young mother does not fit the neo liberal agenda as a ‘desirable’ or acceptable position in society, by making a wrong ‘choice’. It rejects the regulatory discourse of choosing financial security through educational

achievement and 'good' job opportunities by the delaying of childbearing and child rearing.

Graham and McDermott's (2005) systematic review of qualitative research exploring the 'resilient mothering practices' of young (under 20 years of age), British, working-class mothers demonstrate how young working-class women are discursively positioned outside the boundaries of 'normal' motherhood. The evidence suggests that the most prominent of the young mothers' practices of motherhood were in the investment of the 'good' mother identity by maintaining kin relations, and prioritization of the mother/child dyad. Graham and McDermott's (2005) argue that, "while the young mothers' practices display reflexivity and individualism, they are also deeply embedded in, and structured by, social inequalities." (p. 59). The research also found that although teenage mothers do experience severe disadvantage "they seek to limit [the disadvantages] by making motherhood their defining identity and by investing in the social relationships which sustain it." (p.32). It is through these relationships that young women find a 'mode of social participation' within society, however this mode is gendered as it is through secure paid work and the relationship to it that enables a choice in relation to the position of social inclusion or exclusion. Education, training and employment enable a trajectory out of poverty and disadvantage; however, "such a requirement can conflict with gendered subjectivities which continue to be grounded in unpaid rather than paid work and in a major investment in motherhood in particular". (Graham and McDermott, 2005: 32). Motherhood provides a sense of inclusion through the gendered performance of mothering, arguably this is especially salient for young women who have experienced adverse childhood experiences and through their relationships they have a sense of identity and belonging; often in an attempt to 'right the wrongs' of their first families. However, the intersection of age and DVA is problematic, if as Graham and McDermott's (2005) research identified family and social relationship are protective factors that allow a mode of social participation and identity formation. How does this factor within a context in which a young woman as a mother has become isolated through her experience of DVA; who may have had her relationships with her primary family and/ or friends disrupted at best, broken or ended at worst?

Teenage mothers are discursively constructed as 'Other', unable to meet the 'good mother' constructed around 'intensive mothering' (McDonald-Harker, 2016), therefore by default are constructed as 'bad mothers'. As McDonald-Harker (2016) argues "[t]he 'good mother' versus the 'bad mother' dichotomy serves to 'control, police, and sanction the actions and activities of mothers who are expected to meet or conform to dominant standards of motherhood.'" (p.8). As a consequence, some mothers, for example teen mothers, are then "perceived, labelled, and portrayed as 'bad mothers' because they mother outside the boundaries of 'good mothering'" (McDonald-Harker, 2016: 9)

Teenage mothers may be socially disadvantaged and then positioned within a stigmatising framework and research has identified that this stigmatisation impacted on some young mothers and their decision to remain in an abusive relationship; influenced by a fear of further stigmatisation (Wood et al, 2011; Kulkarni, 2007; Goddard et al, 2005). This may be due to the social tolerance of a young mother in a stable relationship with a 'breadwinner' which positions her as performing the 'good mother'; providing a father and 'family' for her child. Even if this relationship is characterised by violence and abuse, it is an invisible characterisation. Research demonstrates that women stay for the sake of the children until the tipping point is reached (Mullender et al, 2002). The abuse and violence is then (re)conceptualised and (re)framed as such so that the DVA's deleterious impact on the children is reified and a (re)examination of their situation is made. If there are enough protective factors and support to be able to escape the relationship with their lives intact, they make the decision to end the relationship, this does not necessarily stop the violence (as the definition for DVA demonstrates), and child contact can provide an ongoing context for abuse.

However, research suggests that against a backdrop of disadvantage, pregnancy can be an active, positive life choice enabling a sense of positive identity and social inclusion (Graham and McDermott, 2005); a choice to counter previous adverse experiences (Wood & Barter, 2014). It may also enable a rejection of stigmatising labels of promiscuity and sexual deviance if in a 'stable' relationship, feeding into gendered discourses of seeking permanence and monogamy. However, complex family histories can make young women more vulnerable around issues of reproductive control and consent and are a

major factor in sexual intimacy for young women's gendered autonomy. However, being a mother can be a joyful positive experience, even in the context of DVA. Radford and Hester (2006) found that women in their research "mentioned no effects from the violence on their parenting or on their relationships with children" (p. 27). Most of the research provides evidence to argue that women are able to be successful mothers and cope well despite the serious challenge of appalling violence and abuse (Radford & Hester, 2006; Sullivan et al, 1999).

Concluding thoughts on the research on romantic love:

What the review here has shown is that conceptions of romantic love permeate public discourse and are performed through the lens of the heterosexual matrix. Love is arguably however, a social construct that shapes and organises our world through our language and our understandings of language, and it is informed and reinforced by gendered discourses that are saturated by popular culture. Research also demonstrates that there is a very strong and complex relationship between women, pregnancy and abuse, and the impact to mother, foetus and child are multifaceted and potentially devastating. Discourses surrounding women as mothers are entwined with gendered discourses and are so powerful and pervasive in constructing mothers as the ultimate expression of the female role, and like the discourses of gender, motherhood and the practice of mothering are rendered invisible by their entrenched interweaving in the social and cultural fabric of our society. Research is very limited however in demonstrating the intersectionality of gender, age, and abuse and the discourses available with which to position one's self as a young mother in an abusive context.

There are substantial gaps in the literature in understanding young women's experiences of romantic relationships, of love and their experiences of reproductive autonomy and motherhood in the context of DVA. I will, through my data analysis address this by exploring the experiences of the young women in my research in chapter six and examine how they made sense of these experiences in chapter seven, before looking at their experiences and understandings relating to reproduction. I now move on to the second part of this review to draw on the broad theme of education as a further context and to

explore its role in relation to young people's experience's and understandings of DVA.

Review of the literature: Part two: Education

The Role of Education

The broad role of education in society is much debated and multifaceted; narrowly viewed as a process of receiving or giving systematic instruction, or, more broadly, as an enlightening experience. Narrow or broad, it is grounded in cultural assumptions and values, as Bruner states "education – and educational research – cannot be kept separate from the life of the culture at large" (1999: 408). Critically, education can be positioned as a way of maintaining and reproducing conditions that serve and benefit dominant social, political and cultural interests; those with power. Therefore, in considering the role of education in relation to young people and relationships, there is arguably no investment in changing the status quo of a culture apparently blind to sexual harassment, gender inequality, violence and abuse. Conversely, education can also be a mechanism of social change and as a means of achieving social, cultural, and economic equity (Friere, 1971; Dewey, 1959; Youdell, 2011). It is possible for 'education' to support young people, who hunger for information, in learning about and understanding that sexual and domestic violence and abuse, so covertly present in our culture, are unacceptable, and to provide a safe context in which to explore, challenge and rescript heteronormative relationship discourses. Debatably, to educate young people about healthy equitable relationships and that which is antithetical is too political (despite the rhetoric). Is education about freedom, or is it in fact polarising, constraining and rigid, constructed by a sexist agenda that represses and avoids the social gendered power differential, unable and unwilling to examine the on-going gender imbalance. What is the most crucial gender issue and crisis here and who says?

Education and Gender violence:

Children and young people spend a huge proportion of their lives in the school setting. A convergence of large numbers of young people, where gender roles are performative; enacted and (re)enacted. On the one hand this can be a breeding ground and provide a 'conducive context' for gender disparity and DVA; and on the other, it can provide knowledge and information to disturb and disrupt the dominant gender discourses that underpins DVA. Schools can provide a safe space to explore and examine healthy sexual and emotional relationships, challenging gendered attitudes, beliefs and behaviours. They can also be the opposite as highlighted by the sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools report discussed in the introduction (page 28). Sexual harassment, physical and sexual assault, and rape are not rare events in the school context (Duncan, 1999). Sexual harassment and the threat of sexual violence act as a form of social control, maintaining gender boundaries and hierarchies (Connell, 1995; Reay, 2003). Boys are also harassed and bullied, by both girls and boys, however, as Reay states "[b]oys are not harassed because they are boys but because they are the wrong sort of boys. This kind of sex-based harassment builds hierarchical differences between boys, between masculinities, in which heterosexual masculinity is superior." (2002: 301). Therefore, the enacting and threat of violence and intimidation of either gender, maintains and perpetuates compulsory heterosexuality. Violence is gendered and sexualised and this has important consequences for how discourses are taken up, understood and (re)articulated.

Current research demonstrates that sexism in schools is common; with 'misogynistic language' and acts of sexual harassment repetitively performed. In 2010 a YouGov poll of 16–18-year olds found that 29% of girls experienced unwanted sexual touching at school, and data published on sexual offences in 2015 recorded in schools over a three-year period, totalled 5,500 sexual offences, including 600 rapes. This is, again, a chronic area of under reporting, only 14% of students who have experienced sexual harassment reported it to a teacher (NEU teaching union and UK Feminista; 2017). The 'low level' insidious nature of sexual harassment is used as a tool of heteronormativity; and provides a normalising culture of abuse. Sexual name-calling such as "slut" or "slag" is routine, with only 6% of students who have experienced or witnessed

the use of sexist language in school reported it to a teacher; arguably the deployment of the discursive tool of 'banter' violating the construction of alternative understandings. In the Women and Equalities Committee inquiry in to 'Sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools' (2016–17), the Chair, Maria Miller MP said:

"Our inquiry has revealed a concerning picture. We have heard girls talk about sexual bullying and abuse as an expected part of their everyday life; with teachers accepting sexual harassment as "just banter"; and parents struggling to know how they can best support their children."

Research commissioned by the NEU teaching union and UK Feminista (2017) found that 27% of teachers reported they do not feel 'confident tackling a sexist incident if they experienced or witnessed it in school' (2017). Further to this is that female teachers are also targets of sexual harassment by male students; demonstrating the gendered nature of harassment and highlights schools gendered context that limits the ability for dominant discourses to be challenged.

Attitudes, beliefs and behaviour learned during these early years show a strong tendency to continue into adulthood (Dahlberg, 1998; Coker et al 2000), therefore having a safe space to challenge the confining heteronormative matrix and be supported through one's peers and community is crucial. Arguably obtaining advice and information on what constitutes a healthy relationship; warning signs that a relationship is not healthy and the signposts for support lay the foundations for establishing healthy practices during these formative years. Schools are a key site for prevention work; in terms of the right age and a captive audience, as the VAWG strategy states:

"Prevention and early intervention remain the foundation of our approach to tackling VAWG as we set out in 2010. Once patterns of violence are entrenched the harder it is to break cycles of abuse, support victims to recovery and independence, and deter perpetrators" (2016: 15).

Tutty et al, (2005) suggest that schools are looked upon as a "natural environment for prevention programmes, addressing entire populations of children with an approach that fits with the purpose of the institution" (p.12). However, Ellis (2014) argues that there is 'little clarity' behind the rationale,

suggesting it may be a convenient route to a captive audience, or an acknowledgement that schools “are a key institution in the production of normative gendered identities and the concomitant violence” (Ellis, 2014: 31). School based programmes addressing issues relating to domestic violence and abuse have been firmly based within other western countries, such as America and Canada (Hague et al, 2001) for the last 30 years. However, despite a history of provision in the UK, primarily undertaken by charities and community initiatives it is suggested these are ‘somewhat patchy’ (Bell & Stanley, 2006), with no clear consistent implementation throughout the formal education system. This is a point reinforced by Sundaram and Sauntson (2016) who state:

“[a]lthough issues of violence against women and girls have long been recognised and a wide range of intervention programmes funded globally (see Parkes, 2015, for instance), commitment to such work with young people has been intermittent and poorly funded in England.” (p. 68).

Unlike Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland preventative education on unhealthy relationships is not a mandatory part of the English curriculum, which is not set to change until 2020. Therefore, take-up rates, what, how and how much is taught in schools varies widely, as does the efficacy of such programmes in terms of behavioural change (Stanley et al, 2015). There appears to be growing impetus for this work, but it appears that the lottery of ‘patchy and inconsistent’ remains and often hinges on proclivities of individual school heads and charitable funding, and arguably both have been under considerable strain since the implementation of austerity measures.

The research evidence strongly states that young people want education in this crucial area, and delivered in a creative, supportive way, it can also be enjoyable as well as informative and impactful. Mullender (2000) highlights the positive impact which some programmes have made and found that 84% of secondary pupils wanted lessons on domestic violence and on how to respond to these issues. Although, arguably there is evidence to suggest a gender difference in the desire for such education, as Burman & Cartmel’s (2005) research highlights ‘[i]n comparison to young women, males appear relatively disinterested in obtaining more information on domestic abuse. This is more marked amongst males in the later stages of schooling.’ (2005: v). This

detachment is perhaps unsurprising given the gender division in terms of the gendered perpetration and reported impact on women and girls, and how this may be framed in an educational context. As the overwhelming majority of perpetrators of violence are men and boys, it is imperative that there is education to support all young people's understanding and the unacceptability and impact of this type of behaviour. However, in order to avoid resistance to the programmes message this needs to take a non-blaming stance to circumvent 'anti-men' or 'sexist' messages (Fox, Hale, & Gadd, 2014). Arguably men and boys need to be on board.

In a recent systematic review of the international literature, and of the UK's grey literature on school intervention programmes, as well as in consultation with young people, Stanley et al (2015) concluded that although a burgeoning field of research, there is a lack of evidence for prevention/ early intervention programme efficacy, indicating the need for further and more rigorous research in the UK. Stanley et al point out that the most rigorous studies are related to the North American context and 'the extent to which programmes are transferable to other settings and cultures is uncertain' (2015: 122). However, indications are that the programmes that were evaluated are positive, highlighting their value in gaining knowledge and challenging/ changing attitudes. However, behavioural change is only affective over time; therefore, it was not one of the affected outcomes, with the exception of one study undertaken in Canada by Wolfe et al (2009). Whilst it is suggested that a change in behaviour will bring about social transformation, it is important not to dismiss the value of knowledge and challenging attitudes of deeply entrenched gendered notions. Research suggests that projects in which young people feel that they have more knowledge about; respect, communication, equality, power, violence and abuse (Mullender, 2001, Bell & Stanley 2006); support a shift in social change.

In changing social norms Stanley et al (2015) identified that 'the peer group emerged as a key mechanism of change and the young people consulted emphasised the importance of authenticity which could be achieved using drama and which required those delivering programmes to have relevant expertise' (p. 120). An example of a drama-based schools projects is 'Tender',

evaluated by Middlesex University identified that young people who took part in the workshop 'had a better understanding of what constitutes an unhealthy relationship including early warning signs, recognised the gendered nature of domestic violence, and knew where to go for help and support.' (Sanders-McDonagh et al, 2015: 52). So, despite the vagaries of who, what, where and how it is delivered there is evidence to suggest that there is a growing body of good practice that can be built on.

Education and gendered sexualised identities:

The most significant area of gender and education is the issue surrounding the nature of gender identity and the ways that educational discourses shape the modern individual (Dillabough and Arnot, 2001: 15). So, like motherhood and love, education is also a performative practice where people get positioned in particular gendered roles, thus it matters in terms of not just what they 'hear in school' but also what discourses they are privy to and what they can become as young people. As Harne states; '[s]chools are sites where gendered power relationships and their interconnections with other forms of institutionalized power such as racism and classism are reproduced and reinforced.' (2000: 87). Education is the site where identity is created, resisted and performed, as Talburt et al argue '[w]e see schools not as purified spaces nurturing innocent children but as concentrated sites of contestation around issues of power and identity.' (2004:2). Children learn to position themselves as identifiable as female or male through subject positioning that are available within 'linguistic practices' (Davies, 1989). Through feminist research in education the subject position and the discourses available demonstrate the problematic of the binary division of gender; gender roles are taken up in multiple and contradictory ways (Francis, 2001). Therefore, in relation to my own research, the construction and discourses of gender and relationships are created and taken-up at the interface; education.

Schools are a site for the production and (re)production of identity; class, ethnicity, gender and sexuality, they converge and intersect, with a struggle for dominance. Dominant discourses constructing gender and sexuality make it difficult to construct pedagogy of sexuality that is inclusive of 'otherness'. Epstein states 'explicit homophobia and implicit heterosexism found within schools derives from and feeds macho and misogynistic versions of

masculinity... sexism in schools needs to be understood through the lens of heterosexism.' (Epstein, 1998: 105).

Femininity and homosexuality are met with derision and the possibility of harassment and violence, maintaining compulsory heterosexuality for all (Connell, 1995). As noted above however, there are many ways that this is battled and numerous ways gender and sexuality are engendered, with heterosexuality resisted or transformed, however, the notion of compulsory heterosexuality is an expedient conceptual tool within education. Epstein (1997). argues it to be 'impossible' to fully understand gender relations in schools without the lens of compulsory heterosexuality, or, as she terms it, 'heterosexism' This needs to be underpinned in education, as Donovan & Hester (2008) argue for the inclusion of an understanding of gender inequalities in sex and relationship education;

"[in] order to counter the ways in which heterosexuality, masculinity and femininity are produced elsewhere in ways that reinforce gendered power dynamics and make it very difficult for young women, particularly, to express and assert their needs in intimate relationships with regard to sex and the terms of the relationship." (p.280).

Compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1980) is played out within schools, constructing and (re)constructing normative gender roles, including gendered norms of aggression, as highlighted by Ringrose and Renold's research, complicating debates around the 'sexualisation' moral panic and by troubling developmental and classed accounts of age-appropriate (hetero)sexuality. They found that 'boys are violent, girls are indirectly aggressive... [and] are passed over in the classroom and schoolyard as natural practice' (2011: 183). Through their analysis they argue that central to the notion of hegemonic masculinity is the gendered and sexualised forms of aggression, harassment and violence and advance 'violent masculinity is not merely sanctioned, it is demanded and usually couched within a discourse of 'heroic masculinity' (Reay, 2002)' (2011: 185). Their research also highlights the normalisation of physical violence through 'the blurring of boundaries between games, play-fighting and violence, with dominant masculinities both tolerated and legitimised'. (2011: 184).

Informal and formal education provides the terrain in which to learn to position one's self, in relation to gender and sexuality. Epstein and Sears (1999) argue that "we learn and are taught to position ourselves within the regimes of truth

through which we understand our gendered, heterosexualised, racialized and classed world; the punishments for transgressions as well as the rewards for conformity” (p. 2). Therefore, education is key to the production of gender and sexuality, it is the space where identities are constructed and performed and where boys and girls learn to be gendered and ‘do’ gender. Reay argues that sex-based harassment is not easily regarded as a gender issue by teachers, suggesting, “It is often seen as a part of normal relationships, as an ‘adolescent mating dance’ (Kenway & Willis, 1998)” (2002: 302). Stein (1995) is vehement in stating that teachers collude in the harassment of girls by failing to respond to sexual harassment, which Tolman et al (2003) believe it “implicitly permits and silently encourage boys to engage in and girls to accept, harassing behaviors” (p. 160). What therefore is the alternative view of education?

Alternative Education:

As Epstein and Sears (1999) above suggest, that through education, we learn and are taught to position ourselves; so that schools are implicated as a location of identity construction. As Youdell (2011) states; “schooling is implicated in the making of particular sorts of people as well as the making of educational and social exclusions and inequalities”, however, Youdell continues to state: “schools are important sites of counter or radical-politics.” (p.1). Schools are sites of contestation. This contestation is happening in a multitude of multifaceted ways in diverse contexts; this may be purposive, inadvertent or incidental. In ‘School Trouble’ Youdell (2011) sets out the ways that radical critical pedagogy can ‘trouble’ the ‘business of schooling as usual’. Drawing on theoretical concepts taken from the work of Deleuze and Guettari (1993), and Laclau and Mouffe (2001) such as: assemblage, rhizome, lines of flight, becomings, affect, anti-identity and antagonism; Youdell suggests ways that these ‘tools can provide critical and political action within education. Arguably through teachers’ critical and feminist pedagogy there are lines of flight that can trouble the status quo. Youdell sets out her imaginings of ‘edutopia’:

“It is a semi-formal space that is physically accessible, welcoming and comfortable; it is a space of listening, exploration and openness; it is a space of dialogue where consensus and disagreement are both important, where uncomfortable truths are spoken and where the intolerable is named and responded to; it is a space where there is time for and interest in children and young people’s lives, ideas, experiences, feelings, imaginings and hopes; it is a space where trust circulates; it is

the space where feelings of all sorts, whether thought through and translated into the language of emotions or in the form of flowing affective intensities, are not simply allowed but are acknowledged as a vital part of living and learning; (2011: 143).

Youdell's 'edutopia' is a very different space to the results driven system of tests, tables and performance indicators that arguably dominate current educational spaces. However, there are arguably ruptures to the status quo that provide a peek into the possibility, no matter how insignificant or fleeting. As Youdell (2011) points out:

"it is a space that is recognised as being deeply political and deeply significant. It is a classroom that I have seen glimpses of in my own research and that has been documented elsewhere. In this sense it is heterotopia. It is a classroom that I would like to teach and learn in." (p. 144).

Through a number of research projects Renold and Ringrose have arguably demonstrated praxis by conceptualisation of Youdell's 'edutopia', creating a 'space of listening, exploration and openness'; in which they explore and document young sexualities in education across political, social and cultural terrains.

In their article Renold and Ringrose explore what else research can do, be, and become and they illuminate ways in which education and educational research can create spaces for alternative education to "consider what can and cannot be spoken about, and what is blocked, re-routed, and transformed in relation to sexualities research in secondary schools" (2017: 1). Through their project they critically explore "the complex formations and experiential accounts of how young people negotiate the daily tyranny of sexual regulation and harassment in schools" (2017: 2). Through their projects their enquiries demonstrate the ways schools can provide spaces for young people to explore ways to voice their experiences and arguably demonstrate that aspects of 'edutopia' are possible.

Renold's work through the 'Relationships Matter' project has been deemed outstanding, winning an ERSC award for impact. This paves the way for a way of rupturing the status quo in education and creating a space for new possibilities and real change. In the project Renold experimented with creative and arts-based methodologies, exploring what research activist engagement might look like with young people exploring sexual violence, Renold co-

composed 'encounters' that enabled the girls in the project to communicate their experiences with a wide audience. As Renold states:

"we found ways for the personal, (via talk and interview transcripts) to loosen its grip on the subject, as 'data' became darta (e.g. ruler graffiti) and darta became d/artaphact (e.g. ruler-skirt). Their potential to enable young people, practitioners and indeed politicians to connect the 'here and now' of experience with deeper (unconscious) historical and embodied knowings of how sexual subordination through violence has endured (and continues to endure) over time. Crafting their experience through objects and other embodied materialities also seemed to augment their/our ability to articulate and share oppressive sexual practices and cultures that didn't immediately fold back and lock into the personal and confessional." (2018: 47).

The project was presented by the participants, through a sharing of their 'da(r)ta' (data entangled with arts-based methodologies), at a school assembly with the wider student body, who were invited to participate in the 'Relationship Matters' activist campaign by sharing their views on 'why they think a real relationships education should be mandatory for all schools in Wales'. Renold shares the success of the project emerging as it did:

"at a timely moment in Wales' political history of creating the first UK legislation on violence against women and girls (Welsh Government, 2015). Moreover, the project's combined focus on sexual violence, gender well-being and activism directly addressed the schools' own concerns and their wider policies to promote 'healthy relationships', 'student voice' and 'active citizenship'" (2017: 40).

The research and activism emanating from this project has had a positive and lasting impact on the Welsh governments' provision of RSE, as evidenced by the Welsh Government making SRE statutory. As part of the campaign a good practice guide has been produced for educational practitioners on 'how to promote gender well-being and gender equalities for respectful relationships. As part of this process a 'change making' tool kit for young people was produced. A key part of this national guide was a young person's guide on 'making positive relationships' matter, and a tool for creating strategies and campaigns, to raise awareness of gender-based and sexual violence.

In another project Bragg et al (2018) has found that through an increase in global awareness young people are being offered important new ways of learning about and 'doing gender'; constantly in process, being made and remade. Their findings, from exploring the views of young people aged 12–14

on gender diversity, drawing on school-based qualitative data highlight that 'many young people have expanded vocabularies of gender identity/expression and that 'young people are negotiating wider cultures of gendered and sexual violence'. The school contexts in Bragg et al's (2018) research were also shown to support learning spaces and opportunities to promote gender equalities through the provision of specific 'lunch clubs' and feminist groups. They state however:

"despite strong support amongst many young people for gender fluidity and for challenging gender norms, from their perspective, schools were generally structured so that 'gender binary choices are frequently inevitable, from school uniforms and toilets to sports cultures and friendships" (p. 420).

They do suggest however that their findings offer a way forward for educators and argue that that they will find young people to be 'allies' in making changes 'towards practices which create and support inclusive gender cultures and address gender equity'. This is a pressing concern, as Bragg et al state:

"Indeed, never has there been a more urgent need for teacher training on critical gender sensitive pedagogies in the context of the historical and contemporary social, cultural, biological and political sex/gender/sexuality landscape (see also Smith and Payne 2016). It also follows that if educators are supported to create conducive contexts through which young people are encouraged to lead the way in some of this work, then potentially rich pedagogical encounters of why, how, where and when gender matters might be formed." (2018: 431).

As this research identifies and the research highlighted above by Renold demonstrated, that by creating a conducive context, such as that of the 'edutopia' (Youdell: 2011) 'of listening, exploration and openness...a space of dialogue where consensus and disagreement are both important, where uncomfortable truths are spoken and where the intolerable is named and responded to; young people can and are, leading the way through a creative, safe space are rejecting normative discourse. There are arguably gaps in the literature that could be addressed by fully exploring creative ways to rewrite relationship scripts.

In this second part of this review I have examined the literature on education to unravel the interweaving of both its current role and the rationale for its potential role in addressing gender violence and DVA. The evidence suggests that education simultaneously provides a conducive context for enabling and

sustaining gendered performances of 'doing girl' and 'doing boy' and the role of harassment and violence that act as a 'training ground' for DVA, but on the other it can rupture the confining heteronormative discourses that enable and sustain DVA. Education can be a way of maintaining and reproducing conditions that serve and benefit dominant social, political and cultural interests or it can be a mechanism of social change and as a means of achieving social, cultural, and economic equity (Friere, 1971; Dewey, 1959; Youdell, 2011).

As a result of their findings on 'Sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools' the Women and Equalities Committee along with the Health committee successfully urged the Secretary of State to implement RSE as a compulsory subject to support young people in ensuring that schools provide safe environments for all students to learn in. The findings of the report also suggest "that if the Government is to tackle "lad culture" successfully at university, its work should start much earlier, in schools." (2016/17: 3). This position has the potential to address the issues directly, but also to challenge the underpinning gendered discourses that sustain gender violence. It is hoped that the current reviews of RSE, along with the Domestic Abuse Bill consultation, will provide concrete actions to redress the UK's patchy and inconsistent offer relating to DVA in formal learning. The work of Renold (2018) and Renold and Ringrose, Youdell (2011) and Bragg et al (2018) highlight ways that both informal and formal education can provide spaces for discussion, exploration and contestation and create a critical pedagogy that can 'trouble' (Youdell, 2011) the usual business of results, test and tables in an environment characterised by gendered sexual harassment sexual violence and violent and abusive relationships. The researchers above all offer a way forward for governments, policy, educators and young people in making an impact on practices that address gender equity and issue of DVA as an expression and form of gender inequity. Considering what is known, there are still identifiable gaps in this relatively new area of research and in particular the voice of young people's experiences across the contexts of DVA and education, and this is the gap my research seeks to address.

Chapter Four: Methodology

“Sometimes I think of it as a form of hygiene. Do your methods properly. Eat your epistemological greens. Wash your hands after mixing with the real world. Then you will lead the good research life. Your data will be clean. Your findings warrantable. The product you will produce will be pure.” (Law, 2004).

This chapter describes my research methodology and how this was informed by my epistemological and ontological positioning, but also by my subjective research journey, as I shared in the introduction, this was a long and bumpy one; traversing rough terrain. This voyage informed and impacted on my research and the methods chosen to ‘produce’ and analyse my data. I start this chapter locating my reflexive self before examining the interconnection between my theoretical positioning and chosen methodology. I move on to discuss the recruitment of my participants and the ethical implications of sensitive research, with particular reference to women survivors/ victims of DVA. Before concluding this chapter, I detail the procedures employed in the transcription and analysis of my research data.

Subjective overview:

I locate a version of my ‘self’ in describing my journey and the interconnected nature of ‘life’ and research. Arguably a position of reflexivity highlights “the capacity of the researcher to acknowledge how their own experiences and contexts (which might be fluid and changing) inform the process and outcomes of enquiry”. (Etherington, 2004: 31-32). By positioning the identities and qualities, or ‘virtues’ (Pring, 2000) of researchers arguably allows for a greater level of transparency in the research process.

Research, like the rest of ‘life’ can be a messy business (Law, 2004), rather than the linear tidy model that is so often presented, as Law’s quote above highlights. Such a sanitized version of the process is a serious departure from my own research journey; however, how does one discuss the vagaries of such a journey? Or, is it that the linear ‘tidied’ version is the only acceptable one; displaying the recommended level of expertise? There is the notion that as a PhD student, the research journey is training; learning transferable skills, cutting one’s teeth at the coal face. My now protracted research journey falls into that

of 'painful and messy'; however, I have indeed learnt many valuable skills along the way, and it has also given me a wider perspective on my research and its context, which can be (re)viewed as beneficial.

For example, whilst attending an ESRC conference I spoke to another delegate further along in their research journey. There were overlaps in our research areas and it was a joy to talk to her, when I discussed in a downcast manner that my research 'had not gone to plan' and talked about what I had done on my research journey so far, she said "wow, that's amazing, you've done so much, the fact that it hasn't gone to plan is so interesting in and of itself and speaks volumes about the social and political landscape in which your research sits". Rather surprised; "Oh yes... I guess" I said, as I tried the notion on for size. In reflecting on this interaction, I was able to unpack the issue and realise that rather than any personal failings, I had a greater understanding that research is often not the straightforward 'objective' process that I may have been expecting from my training and the way the process is presented. My research was more like a complex assemblage of ideas and processes. As the work of Walford (2001), based on extensive educational research, highlights:

"it is now widely recognized that the careful, objective, step-by-step model of the research process is actually a fraud and that, within natural science as well as within social science, the standard way in which research methods are taught and real research is often written up for publication perpetuates what is in fact the myth of objectivity (Medawar, 1963). The reality is very different." (p. 1).

The reality of research is much more personally experiences and is in fact a 'profoundly pragmatic and down-to-earth activity' and, as I have found; 'the real world of research is one of constraint and compromise.' (Walford, 2001:5). My research journey was situated in an ethically sensitive and complex field.

I have located myself within the text to make transparent my role and the impact of my history, identities and experiences on subsequent research choices. This research is not about me, and I struggle with the 'navel gazing' that some forms of autobiography can promote; but it must be acknowledged that the choices made at each juncture were impacted by my biography and my feminist lens. I have been a feminist all my life, however, I only fully realised this when I was 27 and I had returned to study, so that I might be able to go to University; I would be the first in my family. On this course I met a new friend, and after a few days

she said: “you are the most radical feminist I have ever met, and you haven’t a clue what I am talking about have you?!” I didn’t; but I soon learnt all about the theory in my sociology classes. It was like having the key to the door of my life, the key to understanding my world, the gendered classed lens’ through which I viewed and experienced my life. After taking every available class on gender at University, I returned to teach on the very course that had empowered me to believe in myself and my abilities. I wanted to do the same, and I did.

I moved from being a F.E lecturer to working for a domestic violence charity as a facilitator on a ‘recovery and empowerment’ course for women who had experienced domestic violence, as well as working on the helpline. The charity was involved in awareness-raising and training to a variety of institutions and provided local schools with tailor made courses on healthy relationships and abuse. Having a rather late entry into the world of education, I had come to love it and found it somewhat addictive! So, I started to look for scholarships and I applied for an ESRC funded 3+1 scholarship and was successful in getting a place. So, for me, with a background in education, my PhD journey began when the strands of my work and academic life became enmeshed as my research focus. This coincided at a time of potential, meaningful change in the sphere of domestic violence. The NSPCC’s research on teenage experiences of relationship abuse (Barter et al; 2009) illuminated the seriousness of the situation in the UK. There was also a feeling of positivity in both education, and in the domestic violence arena. Primary prevention around abusive relationships had continued along the positive trajectory of mainstreaming policy and practice, taken up by governmental bodies (under Labour in particular), around domestic violence as one aspect of gender violence. So, my research proposal addressed the implementation of the policy to make PSHE statutory, that would include prevention in line with the VAWG strategy. Overjoyed at being awarded a studentship, I embarked on my journey.

In the introduction I shared the complexities of my research journey, the many twist and turn, so here, for clarity I present a linear overview of the research that signifies the destination.

I undertook ten semi-structured narrative interviews with young women who were between 16 and 19 at the time of interview and had all been in abusive and violent relationships at school when under 16. All the young women had sought support from domestic violence and abuse services. From this point support workers working with the young women had provided them with an invitation to take part in my research and they then contacted me if they were interested in participating; twelve young women contacted me, two were unable to meet with me and therefore did not participate in the research. Ethical considerations were made, informed by researchers working in this sensitive area, and I shall explore this more fully, including confidentiality and consent throughout this chapter. The interviews took place in the location and time of my participant's choice. The interviews were between 40 and 210 minutes and were digitally recorded. The data was transcribed and analysed and presented in my thesis is data from seven of those interviews. I shall clarify this further as I move through the chapter to the ethics section.

Theoretical framework and methodology:

"Feminist theories assert that women's lives matter, that naming is powerful, and that the personal is political." (Swigonski & Raheim, 2011: 1).

I set out my epistemological and ontological position in chapter two. I now look at how this positioning informed my methodological considerations and choices, and the reasons and rationale for these adoptions during the research design. I position myself and my research firmly within a feminist framework whilst acknowledging that the feminist canon, as a broad theoretical body, contains many 'feminisms', or varieties of feminist thinking (Tong, 1989). My understandings of the social world draw on social constructionist perspectives; a belief that there are many 'truths' and that these are contextual and contingent. Therefore, I understand social phenomena and meaning, such as gender, sexuality and violence as actively constructed by, and through, continuous social interaction and negotiation. From this perspective social 'reality' is constructed, subjective and provisional. This approach positions knowledge: as socially, historically and culturally contextual and therefore in constant flux.

I also draw upon a broad post-structuralist framework; to produce a productive alliance, the concepts such as subjectivity, discourse and identities have gained prominence in feminist research. A feminist post-structural theory can address a complex agenda which seeks to theorise and understand patriarchal structures and individual agency (Weedon, 1987). Post-qualitative researchers such as St. Pierre and Pillow (2000) also see this as a particularly fertile arrangement and frame their work as “feminist and Poststructural, a relationship that gestures toward fluid dislocations and alliances” (p. 3). The alignment is useful because it aids understanding of the exercise of power that underpins the construction and discourses relating to gender and violence, and how they may be transformed. If power is viewed as socially constructed it can also be socially de-constructed, meaning post-structural feminist theory can be a movement for change. The development of queer theory and Butlers’ (1990) work on performativity (building upon feminist ideas and challenging the social construction of identity and sexuality) is also informative, because it illuminates the connection between gender and sexuality, explaining both as ongoing social processes rather than fact. These ontological approaches support my feminist epistemological viewpoint; commitment to emancipation, the potential for self- reflexivity, and pivotally, privileging women’s subjective experiences. The theoretical frameworks of post-structural and feminist thought, combined with my research aims of ‘doing’ epistemology, “express[ing] concerns, rais[ing] issues and gain[ing] insights that are not generally expressed ” (Creswell, 2009: 174) offer hope for socio-political change.

Theoretical positioning has a significant effect on methodology. There exists a strong methodological argument which views feminist research and qualitative research as analogous, both privileging individual experiences and narratives. This is certainly a view that can be seen to stem from the work of early feminist researchers, emerging at the start of the second wave of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s, challenging so-called ‘male-stream’ research practices. Feminist researcher Ann Oakley (1981) was critical of quantitative research methodology for the potential irresponsibility towards the research participants, seeing this way of obtaining information as an ethically gendered issue. Oakley (1981) rejected quantitative masculinist methodology and argued that feminist qualitative research established “a high level of rapport...a high degree of

reciprocity on the part of the interviewer... [in] a non-hierarchical relationship.” (Bryman, 2001: 326). Kelly et al (1994) further advance that in-depth, face-to-face interviews became the paradigmatic ‘feminist method’. Arguably it was qualitative methodology that became the vehicle that allowed feminist issues to come to the fore (Oakley, 1998). However, it must be noted that Oakley fundamentally revised some of her earlier arguments to posit that the ‘paradigm argument’ that rejects quantitative ways of knowing as masculine ‘buys into the very paradox that it protests about’ (1998: 725). Oakley concludes “[by] maintaining the division between quantitative and qualitative methods and the feminist case against quantification is ultimately unhelpful to the goal of an emancipatory social science.” (1998: 708). I concur with Oakley’s revisions and in her justifications; binary conceptions are obstructive and frustrating.

Feminist research has its roots in the rejection of androcentric positivist inquiry regarded as gender blind, positioning women, their role in society, and pertinent issues as missing, or marginal. Feminist research therefore sought to directly address this by placing women’s experience and voice at the centre of their research. It must be noted that not all feminists agree on these issues, as there is no unifying theory, there is no unifying method. In rejecting the ‘paradigm argument’ at the heart of feminist methodologies there is a commitment to negotiation, and partnership, as Etherington (2004) states: “by viewing our relationship with participants as one of consultancy and collaboration we encourage a sense of power, involvement and agency” (p.32). This I would argue is particularly relevant in sensitive research, such as this.

Participants and recruitment:

Although the process was somewhat extended the process of accessing participants was the same at each point. I worked or connected with a DVA organisation that provided support services for young women who had accessed their service. The young women varied in their engagement with the services offered but the support was available, and all the young women stated that they were out of their abusive relationships, this was ethically crucial in terms of their safety. The young women were offered an invitation to take part in my research. I then made contact, discussed the project and arranged interviews. The young women had either called or text to say they wanted to

participate. I interviewed ten young women, ranging from age 16 to 19, at the time of the interview. The young women had experienced DVA whilst younger than 16 and in the school context; this may have continued past this context or moved into the setting of college as an educational location. The focus is therefore retrospective, however the time delay and the retrospective period is relatively short, as all were or had recently sought (or been mandated to seek) support for an abusive relationship.

Ethical Considerations:

Ethics are in no way a distinct and contained section in my research, but rather, embedded throughout the entire research process, underpinned by moment-by-moment micro processes of ethical judgement or 'ethics in practice'. Procedurally, I sought ethical approval from the Graduate School of Education at the University of Exeter, which was granted, and was subsequently updated and granted in line with the changes in research proposal. All interviews and the subsequent storage of data have been undertaken in accordance with the University of Exeter; all paper documents kept securely in a locked cupboard for my sole use. All electronic data has been anonymised and is password protected. I consulted BERA's ethical guidelines and the WHO's 'Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Research on Domestic Violence Against Women' (Garcia-Moreno, 2001). However, ethics are more than a procedural rule following exercise, but can allow for an informed base of principles (Pring, 2000). I also draw on Aris, Hague and Mullender's work (2003) for very practical and specific ethical considerations in relation to research with women on DVA, which I shall come on to after a look at the broad ethical socio-political concerns of research on DVA.

Broad Ethical issues...

Ethical principles are helpful in framing ethical concerns; however, ethics do pose broader concerns as Watts (2006) highlights "[t]hese principles (consent, confidentiality and conduct of research) had to be weighed against the balance of doing good and doing no harm." (p.386). Therefore, 'ethics' can be vastly different from procedural guidelines. Wider ethical issues are bound up with the political aspects of research and of feminist research aims. As Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) state the goal of feminist research is 'the emancipation of

women (and men) from patriarchy' (p. 14). Whilst this may be the wider intention, I am aware of the potential ethical problems, as raised by Hey (1997) and Back (2006) in researching across boundaries and launching the private into the public sphere. In elucidating how young people view, manage and understand their experiences of domestic violence in the private sphere, awareness and management of how their understandings and experiences are (re)interpreted and (re)presented in the public sphere, is imperative.

It was of utmost importance that the young women in my research, who may have felt powerless and had their agency stultified through their experiences of DVA were not rendered more-so. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) argue that research should be politically transformative but that in the search for truth, knowledge, illumination and solutions, researchers must hold in mind their responsibilities to their participants. Whilst this may well be a primary concern, especially for critical researchers; it would be a mistake to assume that producing knowledge will lead to an improvement: 'indeed it can sometimes make it worse' (Hammersley, 2003: 31). This is underpinned by Acker et al, as they state '[a]n emancipatory intent is no guarantee of an emancipatory outcome' (1983: 431). Therefore, juxtaposed to the drive and aim of 'doing good', is the potential for harm - a multi-dimensional, invisible and unknown concept encompassing the wider socio-political issues related to sensitive research such as this.

Ethics and research with victims/ survivors of DVA:

In undertaking sensitive research then, there are arguably additional ethical considerations; as Garcia Moreno sets out in relation to 'Research on Domestic Violence Against Women'; "issues of safety, confidentiality and interviewer skill and training are even more important than for other areas of research" (2001: 6). Concerns such as causing offence, deception and exploitation of the participants, were specifically addressed in my focus, with the desire to reduce any distress. This is something that was highlighted by Donovan & Hester when, although sharing one's story can be a liberating experience, it may also be distressing, as they found:

"[we] encountered respondents for whom the interview acted as a cathartic experience – in so far as in the telling of a relationship story in

the context of our study, they understood for the first time that they had experienced abuse that resulted in some distress” (2008: 281).

Psychological and physical safety is of paramount importance in research that has the potential to adversely impact the wellbeing of the participants and the researcher (Garcia Moreno, 2001). The potential hazards are very real. Hague and Mullender (2004) outline a set of guiding principles that as well as addressing the ethical issues outlined above have a very practical aspect. I like the way Skinner et al summarise these guidelines:

“[w]hile they [Hague and Mullender] concede there is no right way to consult with women survivors, their advice contains lessons for academics and practitioners alike, including not expecting women to participate for free; catering for child-care and transportation needs; ensuring that data collection does not result in ‘re-victimisation’ and trauma for the women; enabling ‘safe’, equal and confidential participation; involving the women in decision making about the best means for them to participate; not using exclusionary language; providing an opportunity for survivors to comment on findings at an early stage; and making sure that every effort is made so that findings have a positive impact on policy and practice.” (2005: 12-13).

My research was informed by an assemblage of procedural and practical reflexivity underpinned by Gilligan’s (1982) concept of an ‘ethics of care’; that goes beyond these strategies and is based on a feminist relational ethic positioning responsibility and relationships as an empathetic way of responding to others, with an ethical manner as central (Tronto: (1993); Edwards and Mauthner, (2012). As Addelson, (1991) has defined:

“[an ethics of care] posits the image of a ‘relational self’, a moral agent who is embedded in concrete relationships with others and who acquires a moral identity through inter-active patterns of behaviour, perceptions and interpretations” (cited in Parton, 2003: 10).

These are the threads that weave throughout each part and process of my research; in its broadest sense ethical consideration is arguably the motivation for the thesis: there is an ethical imperative to attempt to comprehend the experiences and understanding of DVA and rupture its everydayness.

Informed Consent:

Informed consent can be viewed as an aspect of procedural ethics; however I drew on Renold’s (2008) approach to informed consent, that viewed the ‘slippery notion’ of informed consent as a ‘process’ rather than merely procedural or regulatory. Viewing it as;

“situated (i.e. locally negotiated within each individual research project and thus contextually contingent, historically specific and always in-process); as dialogic (i.e. embedded in the intersubjective relations through which the personal is acknowledged, not denied); as political (i.e. always informed by our own individual and collective political aims” (p. 430).

This rejects any notion of ‘fixity’ or ‘non-ambiguous permission’.

From my first contact with all the young women further details about the project and consent were discussed and I informed them that they were able to withdraw their consent at any time; before, during or after the interviews. On meeting I gave them a printed information sheet (see Appendix, 2, p.245) and asked them if they would like to ask me any questions or needed any further information before they signed a document regarding consent. I made sure that they had my details should they change their minds about participation. I told them that it was totally up to them what they shared, how little or how much and that they did not need to answer any of my questions.

As I was using a digital voice recorder, I introduced the device and placed it on the table between us but tried to make it undetected by other patrons as we were in a public place for all but one of the interviews. I asked what they wanted to say if anyone should come up to us if they knew us. I communicated that at any time they could switch off the recorder (I showed them how it worked) and that they could stop the interview and have a break or stop it completely. This did not happen. I tried to reassure them that I had worked with women who may have had similar experiences and that I was unlikely to be shocked or surprised and I certainly would not be judging them, no matter what they told me. I did feel a little uneasy at times that they were so keen to discuss such intimate and personal information. I wanted to make sure they understood that if they were uncomfortable after sharing any aspect, we could take those parts out, again none of them chose to do that.

At the end of the interviews I reiterated issues regarding consent, making them aware of my contact details, so that if they later changed their mind, they could contact me. One of my participants did contact me a few weeks after her interview and asked if she could withdraw from the research. At which point I said “of course”. Therefore, all of her information and data were destroyed by shredding and then burning!

Confidentiality and Anonymity:

Confidentiality is also an important issue in research, and also critical within services that provide support, advocacy, information and education to people experiencing, or having experienced domestic violence or abuse. I am well aware of the need for confidentiality. I have been in positions where any lapse could result in the most serious of consequences whilst any failure to act appropriately in a situation of disclosure could also result in the same potentially dire outcomes. Therefore to protect participant's confidential information and their anonymity the use of pseudonyms was employed as a standard protective measure; I followed Westmarland (2001) in encouraging participants to invent their own pseudonyms in an attempt to further balance power relations, which actually caused a lot of laughter! The young women tried names on for size and thought it was a funny thing to do. One young woman challenged this and was adamant that she wanted to keep her own name, and for people to be able to identify who she was and what she had experienced. I understood her positioning; however, we negotiated through discussion that although it was a choice, the need for her safety was paramount. All the other women decided that they did not want to choose their pseudonyms but rather wanted me to choose for them, even though I had encouraged them to choose their own. I made it clear that I would not share their information with their support worker, or with anyone else with whom they could be identified. None of the ten young women appeared to be the slightest bit interested in my assurances.

Interviews:

Informed by my feminist ontological and epistemological positioning, and the desire to be authentic to that, I had the aspiration to 'give voice' to young women's silenced voices and to put them at the heart of my research. Giving voice can be described as "empowering people to be heard who might otherwise remain silent" (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998). My advantageous position arguably enabled me to do just that, as Jackson and Mazzei (2009) state: "[q]ualitative researchers have been trained to privilege this voice, to 'free' the authentic voice from whatever restrains it from coming into being, from relating the truth about the self " (p.1). I was nervous of agreeing with this statement, but I hoped it was true.

Reinharz & Davidsman (1992) argues that feminist research methods are arguably methods used in research projects by people who identify themselves as feminist, that said, that is how I identify, but further to this, I believe that it is an ethical approach. So, the method I employed was a semi structured narrative interview. This approach has been made hugely influenced by the work of Oakley (1981) and her use of semi-structured and unstructured interviews; now a core staple of qualitative methodology, in which the subjective position of women's experiences, can be illuminated. Oakley's guiding philosophy was to reject the 'model of rapport' as a hierarchically mechanistic and masculinist method and rather to develop non-exploitive relationships; to be aware of, address and reduce power issues where possible. However, Duncombe and Jessop (2012) highlight the complex ethical issues that are associated with what they call the 'ideal feminist research relationship': "where spontaneous and genuine rapport supposedly leads more naturally to reciprocal mutual disclosure." (p. 119). They continue by contrasting this with the pressures of research that may lead researchers to 'do rapport' by 'faking friendship', concluding "that in practice, of course, all interviewing relationships, including women's interviews with women, are situated somewhere along a spectrum [between the two]" (2012: 119). In undertaking my interviews, I understood the context of this spectrum in this example, and I felt that my authentic positioning allowed for a greater rapport in some interviews than others.

Academic literature is full of 'how-to's; prescribing and 'how not to'; proscribing ways of conducting interviews. However, for me, as Becker (1971) proposed, qualitative research interviews should be more conversational in their nature to illicit a responsive interaction. Such preparatory consideration and rumination of the intended topic and ethics of care for the participants however cannot prepare you for the experience. There is nothing quite like undertaking interviews yourself and being immersed in the processes. In conducting the interviews, I was directed by my own critical reflexivity, drawing on my experiences of working in the field of domestic violence and abuse and on the work informed by scholarship of others in the field such as Hague and Mullender (2004), Donovan and Hester (2008), Campbell (2009); WHO (2001).

In meshing my experiences, feminist ethics and academic scholarship, I gave each of the ten young women who participated in the research as much choice

as possible; about when, where and how the interviews could take place. I asked them about their availability and where they felt safe to talk; whether they needed extra safety planning, if they needed child care or had any disability that affected their ability to participate if they so wished. I offered to collect them and drove them, wherever they chose to be interviewed. Choices of interview location mainly consisted of cafés or fast food restaurants, that were either their favourite or a desired location yet unvisited. The young women had contacted me on my mobile phone number or email address from the invitation given by their support worker. I then text or emailed and asked when a good time to call would be. I then called and asked if they would like more information about the research and if they had any questions and if they would like to take part or meet to ask further questions. Some of the initial phone calls were quite lengthy and involved and we got to know each other quite well in a short space of time. I was asked about what I did and why I was doing the research. I answered all of the questions as fully and authentically as possible and some of the young women started to share their stories, which I tried to curb so that I had covered the ethical issue of consent but also aware of the ethics of the micro interactions that may represent a power dynamic if I were to curtail the conversation, therefore some of the conversations were extended. I would then text them the day before our interview, as arranged, to check that they were still happy to participate and that the arrangements were ok for them. If I was not collecting them from an address I arranged to meet them outside of their chosen venue and would call them when I had arrived. All of them, with one exception was keen to order food and drinks, which I also indulged and went for similar refreshments (some of which I had never ordered before and might not again!). The interview's lasted from between 40 minutes and 210 minutes as directed by the young women. I was directed by them as to where we sat.

Each interview began with a detailed explanation to the participant regarding the purpose and structure of the 'conversation', discussing confidentiality and obtaining consent. I then utilized an opening overview question, inviting the participant to tell her story, as Hermanns (1995 cited in Flick,2009) suggests – 'how it started' – from the beginning of her relationship. Such 'in-depth' interviews can provide the context for reducing the voice of the researcher (Allen, 2011), and this is thought to support the development of non-exploitative

relationships within research (Letherby, 2003). As the interviews progressed, I asked further questions in which to draw out their experiences relating to DVA, (See appendix 3 for my interview questions schedule) as although the young women's experiences were situated within a context of education this was not made explicit through their narratives. I also asked specific questions on their views of the role that education could play in young people's experiences of DVA (for a I was drawing on the literature on conducting interviews with women who have experienced abuse, and I felt that as Campbell et al (2009) stressed, in undertaking face-to-face interviewing as a data collection method in the research of domestic violence, extensive knowledge of the subject is required. They also highlight that "[t]he survivors also emphasized that interviewers need to show warmth and compassion" (2009: 595). I believe that I had the skills, experience and personality that was able to be that interviewer. In dealing with sensitive issues and the potential of [re]traumatising participants it is important to foreshadow any problems (Malinowski, 1922) and reduce any 'unexpected upset' as Johnson and Benight (2003) suggest, by 'enhancing the details concerning the clarification of risks in informed consent documents'. So as I stated I made sure that they had the information that they needed throughout the interview process so that they had the means to withdraw consent, or ask me any further questions. Whilst it may not be possible to ensure that research interviews are non-exploitative on every level, it was important to attempt, so for me this was a fundamental principle of my interviewing approach. As Westmarland argues

"[f]eminist researchers are working within the wider women's liberation movement and are working towards the overall aim of all women being free from oppression. It is hence clearly not acceptable for researchers to further oppress women in the name of academic research." (2001:3).

I did not feel that I persuaded my participants to disclose things that they did not wish to disclose, however there were times that I wondered how they would feel if they had not shared their experiences, understandings and views. As Duncombe and Jessop argue "interview relationships raise common ethical problems, to the extent that they encourage or persuade interviewees to explore and disclose experiences and emotions – on reflection – they may have preferred to keep to themselves." (2012: 119). I tried to mitigate for this.

Interviews and ethical considerations:

Being ethically mindful in practice I maintained my own authentic voice, I did not in any way support the violence described by the participants and I challenged any notions of it being 'her fault'. There are suggested 'quality' markers for interviewing, but I take on board Kvale's (2009) arguments in upholding the quality of my interviews.

"there are no unequivocal quality criteria for research interviews. A good interview rests upon the craftsmanship of the researcher, which goes beyond a mastery of questioning techniques to encompass knowledge of the research topic, sensitivity to the social relation of interviewer and interviewee, and an awareness of epistemological and ethical aspects of research interviewing." (p.174).

The first interview started with my participant telling me she probably wouldn't have much to say... we ended the interview 210 minutes later. We emerged after untangling some of her experiences and she stated how enjoyable it had been and asked if we could go and get some sweets. This had a profound and unsettling effect on me. On reflection, I am not sure if it was because both the request for sweets, and the fact that she asked for my agreement were so childlike. This was so at odds with the interview; the discourse around violence and abuse and its management, and the constructing of an identity as an agentic survivor in an 'adult' world, when she was 16 and pregnant; it highlighted the contingent fluid nature of identities.

I hoped that through the measures I had taken I did not [re]traumatise my participants. There were a couple of moments that concerned me, however, I was able to offer support and asked if they wished to continue or how I could help. Overall the young women appeared determined and passionate about sharing their experiences. I had purposefully sought to interview young women who had received support and had a desire to 'tell their story', and that they had an awareness that what they had experienced was abuse. That being said, this cannot be measured; arguably through the interviews they were making sense of the situation with a renewed perspective and seemed to gain clarity and insight through the process. This may compound trauma, but none of my participants reported this to be an issue.

Through my professional context I was used to talking to women who had experienced DVA and therefore I did not use unnecessary language that could

be perceived as exclusionary. It is generally unnecessary to make language more difficult and impenetrable, and to use more words than is necessary. It can be a (mis)use of power when in discussion with anyone with different understandings to you. I tried to utilise straight forward, clear language without the use of jargon. In acknowledging Hague and Mullender's (2004) statement 'why expect women to participate for 'free'; I didn't; I gave each of my ten participants a high street voucher of their choice as thanks, the fare for the bus if I was not picking them up and the option of a drink and food if we met at a café or restaurant.

Feminist research practices seek to reduce exploitation through reciprocity (Reinharz, (1992). Although I understand what I have to gain from my research (in the form of a PhD qualification) I maintained a desire to make the research useful for my participants, in the advice offered, support given, or as part of a cathartic process (even though it is recognised that research cannot replace counselling). A pragmatic balance needs to be struck however, between authenticity, and idealism. I look to Skeggs' (1997) research where she highlights that the women in her research were able to 'resist' her if desired but that they 'enjoyed' the research, as it gave them a sense of 'self-worth', which she states was "enhanced by being given the opportunity to be valued, knowledgeable and interesting" (1997: 81). I found, like Skeggs that the young women who participated found being interviewed a process that they all 'enjoyed' or found 'useful', 'helpful' or 'good', especially in relation to the notion of providing a potential 'mouthpiece against their injustices' in relation to abuse and violence, and to 'making a difference'.

Interview Transcription:

There are pros and cons to any type of recording, however, to give my participants my undivided attention and immerse myself in their stories I chose to audio record. Permission was sought from my participants and all agreed. However, a recording device can make some participants uneasy, which it did in two of my interviews; so I explored what they didn't like and I offered not to use the device, at this point of challenge and resistance my participants were then happy to continue and did not require an alternative. By recording interviews there is a verbatim record for reference, this is especially helpful in extended interviews, which many of the interviews I undertook were. One of the

disadvantages of audio recording however is the dependence on the equipment. I had practiced countless times and I had made sure that I had new batteries at each interview. However, as Kvale highlights:

“[t]he first requirement for transcribing an interview is that it was in fact recorded ...A second requirement for transcription is that the recorded conversation is audible to the transcriber...[t]his may require that the interviewer takes measures to avoid background noise” (2009: 179).

This sounded very amusing before I started the interviews, however, it really wasn't! I felt that this issue posed a significant ethical dilemma. As part of my feminist ethics of care, and concern for the use and abuse of power, I asked the young women in my research to choose where, when and how the interviews proceeded. I gave them the option of where to sit, which proved problematic when positioned near the coffee machine and I did not feel that it was appropriate to then ask them to move once we were comfortable, so the balance of ethics in practice and obtaining the data can cause a difficult tension. This ethical stance resulted in a whole audio file being unusable due to the background noise. I was unable to hear anything that was said, I was so disappointed in my positioning.

The process of transcription: ‘to transform, to change from one form to another...translations from an oral language to a written language’, (Kvale, 2009:178) was not without challenge. As Alldred and Gillies (2002) highlight, “transcription is not the straight-forward, passive process it is assumed to be because representing intersubjective interaction on a two-dimensional page entails some compromises.” (p.159). Whilst the goal of transcription may be to transcribe the spoken words verbatim: to ‘give’ voice and to remain as faithful to the participants, this posed a greater challenge than expected. The challenge of representing utterances; repetition and slang and even in leaving gaps between words and punctuating was problematic. As Cameron points out “by punctuating it I have made the transcription easy to read, but it is not a faithful representation of my data”. (2001: 35). It is through the process of transcription that the researcher has power over the interpretation, (re)interpretation and representation of participant's voice. I transcribed in a way that was as ‘full and faithful’ (Cameron, 2001:33) to the participants voice. I did not want to distort or distract, as this holds power, as Kvale (2009) points out “what is said in the hermeneutical tradition of translators also pertains to transcribers: traduire

traottori – translators are traitors.” (p.178). So, I maintained the tension between authenticity of the speaker and issues of accuracy and discrepancies of the process of transcription/ translation (see Silverman, 2017).

Data analysis:

The data analysis, like other activities within my research project was not confined to a ‘distinct stage’ Coffey and Atkinson (1996) but was part of the reflexive process throughout the research, arguably aided by my extended journey. Data analysis was a serious consideration; a rigorous process that held the potential for (mis)interpretation, as Holland and Ramazanoglu (2002) put it, “interpretation is a key point in the exercise of power” (p.116).

After some extended consideration, due not just in part to what was ethical and ‘right’ in relation to the statement above, but also for fear of doing it ‘wrong’, not being up to the academic rigour. I made various attempts but was unsure if my method was systematic and rigorous enough, however, it felt ‘wrong’. I very much identified with Lather (1991) who stated that data analysis was “the black hole of qualitative research” (p.149); it felt like I was disappearing without trace. As a novice researcher you feel that you must follow a process of coding as taught, but as Jackson and St.Pierre (2014) highlight, this is arguably a positivist approach, a “quasi-statistical analytic practice...that has, unfortunately, been proliferated and formalized in too many introductory textbooks and university research courses. A question we might ask at the outset is whether one would code data if one had not been taught to do so.” (p. 715). Asking myself this question I turned to alternatives.

I was drawn to thematic analysis: “a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organises and describes your data set in (rich) detail (Braun & Clarke: 2006: 6). I realised that I had been engaged with the process of analysis throughout the process of data collection by noticing “patterns of meaning and issues of potential interest in the data” (Braun & Clarke: 2006: 6). So, although I had been engaged in the process, I became more active in relation to the data; I listened to the digital recordings repeatedly, and read and re-read the data transcripts; immersing myself in the data as Braun and Clarke suggest:

“it is vital that you immerse yourself in the data to the extent that you are familiar with the depth and breadth of the content. Immersion usually involves “repeated reading” of the data and reading the data in an active way searching for meanings, patterns and so on. It is ideal to read through the entire data set at least once before you begin your coding, as your ideas, identification of possible patterns will be shaped as you read through.” (2006: 16).

I started with the broad areas that my research was focused upon, namely domestic violence and abuse, gender, age and education. I then identified the themes that my research questions had sought to answer. I was on the lookout for discourses, acceptance and rejection; themes, coherence and incoherence. I then developed a system of colour coding my transcriptions, which I did on paper, and physically cut and paste; messy but effective, which had an embodied sense that I was ‘engaging with the data’. As McClure (2013) envisions;

“Perhaps we could think of engagements with data, then, as experiments with order and disorder, in which provisional and partial taxonomies are formed, but are always subject to metamorphosis, as new connections spark among words, bodies, objects, and ideas. (p. 229).

The connections I made were also unmade and the ideas I had then metamorphosed. In looking for ‘discursive positionings’ (Davies and Harre, 1990) the young women took up in their narratives, I was trying to interpret for ‘ideas, beliefs, norms, discourses, reproduction of culture, and their effects’ (Holland and Ramazanoglu, 2002), as well as the silences. The discursive contradictions (Ringrose 2008) within the process of analysis data became like ‘hot spots’ where the data ‘glowed’ to both ‘disconcert’ and create a sense of ‘wonder’ (MacLure, 2013: 172-173). For me the ‘hot spots’ were further themes that emerged out of the data, such as the themes of pregnancy and motherhood, that although major findings were ‘hidden’ within the narratives and were not a part of my research questioning. This was a rich seam of ‘wonder’ that exposed the shared narratives of: ‘Told to get rid’, ‘Fathers and DVA’ and ‘A failure to protect’.

MacLure’s (2013) use of the concept of ‘wonder’; defined by drawing on Daston and Park (2001: 13) as ‘a passion [that] registered the line between the known and the unknown’. This spoke to me when analysing my data, as MacLure positions: “Wonder is not necessarily a safe, comforting, or uncomplicatedly positive affect. It shades into curiosity, horror, fascination, disgust, and

monstrosity.” (p. 228). It was not safe or comforting, but I felt wonder through the shades, to disgust and monstrosity through the process of analysis. There was a sense of wonder at the, at times, monstrous shared themes of abuse and the process of sense making out of the senseless and the dominant role of love. The process of analysis continues throughout the writing and beyond; in trying to ‘think with theory’ and make meaning out of my interpretations. Thus, my hope is that by ‘attending to glowing, disconcerting data’ I will find a way that ‘propels [me] to do something!’ (Ringrose & Renold, 2014: 779).

Methodological Conclusions:

In this chapter I have detailed my methodology in light of my philosophical positioning, and how I chose the methods in light of my feminist beliefs. Arguably research in the area of young people; exploring gender, relationships, sex and violence may always be problematic, and although this problematic positioning was foreshadowed, the sense of invisibility and the construction of discourses that support this invisibility was challenging to navigate.

Through my ‘messy’ journey it has become more evident that the socio-political and cultural terrain is very bumpy indeed. I have been creative and tenacious in the research process and in trying to provide a supportive context for exploring young people’s perceptions and experiences of relationships of abuse and education and the discourses that shape their experiences and understandings. In using Wendt and Zannettino (2015: 23) notion of feminist theorising of domestic violence as a framework, I have attempted, through my use of in-depth narrative interviews with young women to analyse their experiences. Therefore, through my analysis in the coming chapters I am pursuing some ‘explanations that support efforts to transform these social relations’. Momentum is building for change, but it needs to find a point of rupture. Public and political awareness is growing, however, through this process the view of the landscape has moved from a position of positivity, to a new contradictory position, but with hope. Ongoing calls for action, especially in education and prevention work, have been met with the continued patchy application and take up of educational courses, despite young people’s requests and demands. The analysis chapters will examine these issues through the focus of young women’s ‘voices.

I conducted ten interviews with young women, however, one asked to withdraw from the research a week after the interview; one was unable to be heard on the recorder due to the coffee machine! So, her 'data' was written as field notes and informed the overall context, but I was unable to quote and analyse her data. A third participant I heard from three weeks after the interview and her mental health had been deteriorating at the time of the interview and I was reluctant to continue, however, she was adamant that she wanted to. In that interview I was very supportive and suggested that she may need further support. I discussed with her that I would contact her in a few weeks to find out how she was and if she still wanted me to include her data. This is when I found out that due to her poor mental health she had been sectioned. I made the decision not to include any of her data. The data presented is from seven interviews, but I want to acknowledge all ten amazing young women.

Chapter Five:

Introduction and contextualisation of participants

My analysis chapters begin with an introduction to my participants. In order to contextualise their experiences, I initially situate them in relation to broad known 'risk' factors and how these manifest and impact upon their positioning as young women and their experiences of domestic violence and abuse. In the following chapters I focus in more detail on their experiences of relationship abuse and their understandings of their experience, how they make sense of the senseless by drawing on discourses of romantic love and how the performance of gender influences these discourses. This includes in chapter eight a focus on pregnancy and motherhood. Whilst I had an awareness of the potential that issues relating to pregnancy and motherhood may emerge from my research, it was in no way an anticipated outcome. In fact, I was very surprised at the emergence of this theme in my small sample. The literature review reveals a gap in knowledge in this area that my data clearly addresses. Finally, in chapter nine I explore the young women's understandings of informal and formal education and the role it played in their experiences and the role the young women suggest that education could play, in both a broad and narrow sense, and in making a difference to domestic violence and abuse.

I consider how the young women's narratives are employed as discursive tools in order to make sense of their relationships and due to their limiting nature, they constrain what is able to be told and imagined. I aim to extend and expand what is known by providing a 'fleshing out' of the contextual hanger, by exploring young women's experiences and understandings; to give depth and enhance the growing knowledge in this area of sensitive research and in seeking ways to rupture confining gendered discourses that legitimate or hide DVA. Their narratives are presented using long extracts, this is to allow the young women to tell their stories in their own words, and because they are very telling in their entirety.

My participants:

All the young women were under 16 when they experienced violence and abuse in their relationships and were at school at the time of the experiences. The experiences may have been short lived or may have been part of an ongoing state or with subsequent partners. My participants all have pseudonyms that I chose (see the methodology chapter for an explanation), and they are:

Sam

Sam was 18 when I interviewed her, she had a child when she was 16 and stated that she was no longer in a relationship with the child's father, or in any other relationship. She lived with her child.

Sadie

Sadie was pregnant when I met her and was 16 at the time of the interview. She lived at home with her mother and siblings and was not with the father of her child but had started a new relationship.

Katie

Katie lived on her own and was 18 when I interviewed her, she had a daughter, but she had been removed from her care.

Ruby

Ruby had been homeless but had just been given temporary housing. She was 19 at the time of the interview and had a son who had been removed from her care. She was no longer with the father of her child but was in a new relationship.

Grace

Grace was 19 and was in a new relationship at the time of the interview, and she was living at home with her father.

Sophie

Sophie was 17 and was still in education at the time of the interview. Sophie was the only participant not to discuss motherhood or having been pregnant. She was living at home with her mother and brothers and was in a new relationship.

Jessica

Jessica was 19 at the time of the interview and lived with her child but was going through court proceedings for 'failure to protect'. Her new relationship had just been ended due to her ex-partners intimidation of her new partner.

Contextualisation through 'Risk' Factors:

Due to the open nature of the narrative approach of my interviews, I did not specifically ask for background information or factors they felt had impacted on their experiences, but these are themes identified that emerged through the analysis of their stories. I examine the risk factors through introducing my participants' narratives as they relate to and provide a way of culturally locating them. The primary risk factor identified in relation to DVA is gender; all of my participants are female and as I discussed in my methodology chapter that due to my ethical position in gaining access to participants for my research, male victims/ survivors were not accessed. I have argued throughout for the recognition of DVA as a gendered issue and as THE primary risk factor.

Age gap:

'I was 15 he was 20 there was something not right there'.

Sam

The risk of the 'age gap' was apparent in my research; all of the young women had experienced DVA with a partner who was older, and in all but one case, they were significantly older, which as Barter et al (2009) point out routinely presents a significant risk factor, this was highlighted by my interviews with girls': Sadie, Ruby, Grace and Sam. In particular Sadie's story reflects findings from Barter's research emphasising girl's preference for older boys, their rationale was due to their perceived social status (2013):

Sarah: Was he the same age as you?

Sadie: No, he was 19 and I was 15. I mean it wasn't a big age difference, I mean I always went for the older guys anyway. I thought older guys were better, it was the way I went; I thought they were better to be with.

Sadie describes going for older guys as a choice that she made, although at a later point in the interview positions her partner as preying on her on social media; describing herself as identifiably vulnerable from her social media persona and posts. Ruby's story relating to the age gap between her and her partner is another of vulnerability and need where she is looking for a partner to love her, care for and look after her, due to her fragile self:

Sarah: Was he much older than you?

Ruby: Yeah, he was 28. I thought he would look after me. But he needed me. I found out he was homeless; he was actually using me to keep a roof over his head. But then I guess I was seeing him so he could look after me. Where I was living; in not a safe place.

Ruby was 15 years old at the time. The age gap she describes is that of 13 years. Already a vulnerable young woman Ruby describes a perception that she could be looked after, although this becomes '*But he needed me*', arguably to be responsible for him. What Ruby goes on to describe of her relationship is the furthest conceptualisation of being 'looked after' imaginable, (I will come on to Ruby's story in more detail in chapter 9 in exploring young women's experiences). Ruby became the caretaker of the relationship, maintaining the relationship in her role of carer. Grace also shares her experience in relation to the age gap between her and her partner:

Sarah: so that was your first proper relationship at 14; what was it like?

Grace: again, looking back things are so different. When you look back to when you are in that situation. No one was meant to know about us because I was 14 and he was 18. I guess I looked at him like a man, he was my brother's friend and my brothers would have killed him if they had of known. So, I wasn't allowed to say anything. So, he made sure that he got it through to my head that I couldn't tell anyone because he would go to prison, and I could get in big trouble. I wasn't allowed to tell anyone about it and that as soon as I was 16, then everyone could know about us. I believed every word he said I suppose, he messed me around so much it broke my heart.

Grace's narrative of the age gap was further complicated by issues of consent. She describes trust on both sides; trust that he was a family friend and the trust required of her to keep the relationship hidden. Through an awareness of the gendered discourse of responsibility, Grace accepts the 'blame'; positioning herself as responsible for any 'trouble' if the secrecy were broken. This was bound up with the narrative of 'star crossed lovers', enabling the normalisation of the abusive situation; allowing the silence to be constructed through romanticisation; rather than low power attributed to the age gap (Volpe, 2013). Hindsight provided a clear vision of heart break, as I will examine in chapter 9 in exploring Grace's story further.

Sam also talks about her experience of the age gap:

Sam: I never really had boyfriends before him, or nobody serious. Although when I was 15, I did end up being with a 20-year-old. But I don't know. He used to wind me up so much I would be throwing plates at him and shit. And he was a no no as well, I know it's not the right things to do but, I was 15 he was 20, there was something not right there.

Sarah: So, when you think back to that relationship was it abusive?

Sam: Yes, he was abusive. He was emotionally abusive, more so than the last ex, rather than physical. To be honest it was me that was physical when he was abusive. To be honest I have never really had a nice normal healthy relationship.

Sam describes being agentic by using a physical strategy to retaliate in response to her partners' abuses. Arguably a child and an adult that suggests her lack of power in the relationship dynamic, and Sam states '*To be honest it was me*' accepting the blame for the abuse, locating her actions within the discourse of abusive rather than in defence from his abuse. Sam states: "*I have never really had a nice normal healthy relationship*"; suggesting that it is possible and desirable, and questionably 'normal'.

In these examples Sadie, Ruby, Grace and Sam describe how age difference played a role in their relationships and adds to the idea of low relationship power based on age gap. For Sam it was clear when she states: '*I was 15 he was 20 there was something not right there*'; meaning it was 'wrong'. Although she did not elucidate, her later point of not having a 'normal', healthy relationship is telling. Sam also confides that she was physical in her response to his abuse and describes this as her own sense of power, in being agentic. The data supports the concern that adolescent girls have low relationship power when there is such a marked age gap and I reiterate Barter's argument that 'older partners, especially "much older" partners, routinely represent a significant risk of DVA.

First relationships:

First relationships pose a risk as they occur around a period of change and are an induction into the institution and successful performance of gendered heterosexuality (Chung, 2005), and supported by broader romantic love discourses. My research findings are supportive of this framing, although,

drawing on my data I would go further. Affected by a lack of alternative discourse a *pattern of abuse* may emerge in the first relationship leaving the young woman vulnerable to further abuse; transferring from first relationships to subsequent relationships, causing a calcification of relationship expectations and performances of relational power imbalance. Sadie's narrative of her first 'serious' relationship illuminates the opportunity for such patterns of abuse to develop in a first relationship:

Sadie: yeah when I look back on it, it was like from another person's point of view, it's like 'that's abuse; why you with him? That's abuse', but from my point of view you don't see it as you love them, you always see the person you love. It's just like a normal relationship, I didn't know any different I'd never been in a relationship that long I never thought "that's wrong; that's right". I mean I wish I would have known, then I could have got away from it earlier and it wouldn't have meant that I'm messed up now, so now I can't have a boyfriend without sketching out... you know it's doing it again... anyone who smells like EM [aftershave worn by the perpetrator] I couldn't be with them or anything like that, it's so mental it just messed me up.

Sarah: and do you think that maybe because it was a first relationship you thought 'this must be normal'?

Sadie: yeah, I haven't been in a relationship long enough to realise because I've been with guys who just do one, sleep with me and then they're gone in seconds. That was a good relationship, that's the only reason I thought it was a good relationship, because he was the only guy who actually stayed with me after sleeping with me and I thought he does like me because he stayed with me and other guys didn't.

Sadie's narrative demonstrates a process of normalisation of a range of behaviours in a first relationship that she subsequently viewed as abusive, stating 'I *didn't know any different*', therefore identifying there was something 'different' to know and rejecting the central discourse. The fact '*he was the only guy who actually stayed with me after sleeping with me*' was the signifier that he must 'love' her, positioning him as someone to love draws heavily on and accepts a conception of the romantic love. For Sadie, a man staying with her after sex signified a 'good relationship'. This contradictory positioning of love and abuse featured side by side in first relationships is also captured by Katie:

Sarah: did you have relationships in school?

Katie: yeah towards the end of school. When I was younger, I had loads of boyfriends I went through a phase from 14. At the time they felt quite

serious. I had a relationship for 6 months and slept with this person and it was quite serious, I loved him. It was quite abusive, like young abuse.

First relationships are inevitably characterised by an absence of experience, a lack of modelling and a lack of available discourse of 'healthy' or good'; as both Sadie and Katie demonstrate.

Family violence:

The connection between adverse childhood experiences and experience of DVA was clearly articulated by the participants in my research. Starting the interviews with an open question enabled the young women to construct their own stories. Some chose to share their experiences of trauma in childhood, to almost 'set the stage'. In some cases, this was a linear chronological narrative of abuses, decided on by them, to share this aspect of their situated experiences. ALL the young women I interviewed had experienced DVA and/or mistreatment/ neglect and child sex abuse in their first family.

This robust connection was made visible as a thread that was entwined throughout the data, and this contextual thread was unravelled by my participants as we explored their stories. As this interview with Grace unmistakably demonstrates:

Sarah: so, you said you could see the signs?

Grace: yes, I think probably looking at it now, but I had a few relationships like it, but my mum and dad, although, it wasn't as bad as some can be, but he was a bit, I guess you could call it, abusive and I grew up watching them. So, when I started getting my first boyfriends, I didn't really think anything of it I guess, I just thought this is relationships. I know I used to look at other people and their relationships and think 'God they are lucky'. I used to think they had really normal relationships and why couldn't I have one of those. So, mum and dad were the first I grew up seeing things and then when I was 14 I had a boyfriend and he was like it. I had one that was your horrible teenage lad but nothing dangerous, and then as I got to 15 during exam time at school and I got with my longest term first horrible proper boyfriend.

As Grace's insightful narrative states '*I didn't really think anything of it I guess, I just thought this is relationships*'. This normalisation of DVA within the data, started as shown above, but developed throughout the data, positioning gendered relationship expectations; even if there was an understanding that

theirs wasn't a '*normal*' relationship, often a new discursive was developed in which relationships are, paradoxically, abnormally normal. This theme will be expanded on when I explore the young women's experiences of abuse further. Jessica also witnessed DVA as a child and here she describes the impact on her:

Jessica: I remember snippets of my mum and dad's relationship and that was really awful, she was really tiny and like frail and not very confident and he used to tell her she was too fat and things and she was a size 6, and that nobody else would want her and I think that really rubbed off...She would always suffer it, and I watched her, and it broke my heart.

The normalisation of violence in relationships starting in childhood needs serious challenge to offer both supportive factors and competing discourses of relationships to disrupt and open a dialogue of 'unacceptability'; to offer alternatives to the inevitability or 'normal' part of a relationship; and the notion of 'choice' in violence perpetration. The impact on children of DVA is known to be significant and long reaching, but, as Callaghan et al (2015) point out in "they [children] are still represented both in professional discourse and before the law as passive, as affected by the violence, but not really bound by the coercive control that is often an integral part of a violent household" (p.24). Given the incidence of DVA in households in the UK it is crucial that alternative spaces are created to offer the opportunity for challenge in alternate conceptions of relationships as which I will argue further in chapter ten on education.

Peer violence:

Peer violence is a risk factor that once more overlaps with other factors, seemingly significant in the types and context of violent behaviour. Peers and peer pressure have a huge influence on young people's behaviours that provide a milieu of acceptability, normalising abusive and violent behaviours enabling both the perpetration and victimisation of violent and abusive actions. There is an association of bullying and the acceptance of violence in peer cultures, as Sadie's story makes evident:

Sarah: you said you went through some bullying at school?

Sadie: yeah, I had it from year 5 to year 10 I've had it all my life, so that's a lot of abuse from everyone, my boyfriend and all of my mates.

Sarah: were they your friends initially?

Sadie: yeah... had one that was my best mate and she was the one that bullied me in the end. Really weird, we would fall out and she'd get everybody, all the hard girls on me to beat me up, I got hit round the face once or twice and spat on and crap like that. You get used to the abuse.

As Sadie states 'you get used to the abuse', so arguably violence is contextualised and performed as a normal aspect of both intimate and peer relationships. It could be argued that the neo liberal agenda of co-opting and paying lip service to concerns of sexism and abuse become mainstreamed and cloaked in British humour, words like 'banter'; defined by the Oxford Dictionaries as "the playful and friendly exchange of teasing remarks", have become a discursive tool to excuse inappropriate language and behaviour. This behaviour is often misogynist and overtly sexist, but couched in humour that appears to evade detection, or correction, unlike other forms of abuse such as homophobia or racism. Ruby's story below as a young woman on the receiving end of bullying behaviour highlights the nuances of complex and contradictory behaviour:

Ruby: in year 7 I was really shy, and I would get picked on for being smaller and shy. This tall guy makes really rude comments and is really horrible and then this other guy did too, but it turned out that he fancied me.

Sarah: how did that make you feel?

Ruby: It's so confusing; from the beginning they treat you badly because they like you!

Banter can also be physically enacted by 'play fighting'. This can be sanctioned in peer relationships through the 'boys will be boys' discourse of physicality. This becomes translated in to the apparent use of consensual violence and abuse as a 'courtship ritual' (Lavoie et al (2000); Foshee et al (2007); over half of the boys in the NSPCC research stated that their 'violent behaviour was due to messing around' (Barter et al 2009). This is demonstrated in the following excerpt from Jessica's story:

Jessica: he would just kick out at you if he got annoyed. You would be at the other end of the sofa and he would literally just kick you. I would say 'don't do it' and he would say he was 'just playing' and then he would just come to hitting me and then other spiteful things.

There appears to be a concerning level of normalisation of DVA in young people's relationships; incoherent, conflicting behaviours that are at best confusing and at worst abusive, violent and dangerous. Where these lines are drawn seems to be lost in the contradictory dialogues of relationships. Arguably it is difficult, due to a lack of availability to draw on alternative discourses of relationships and love. If the discourse cannot be located in the fairy tale it becomes located in the 'dark versions' (Wood, 2001) instead. Below is an excerpt of Grace's understandings of 'normal' relationships:

Grace: when you're younger and you think you really like them but when I look back now it wasn't anything major, even he slapped me round the face, and I fell backwards up some stairs. As kids, he was the same age as me, so he wasn't like a man, even in a normal relationship you still got here, and they would be horrible. He would meet up with girls when he wanted and then tell me about it. So, when I was growing up, they were all horrible but not dangerous if that makes sense?

Sarah: yeah, it does...

Grace: I thought that what happened behind closed doors with me probably happened behind closed doors with them, even though they said it didn't; I just thought it happened to everyone. We are happy in public just like they are happy in public, although sometimes we would fall out in public and he would say things. That was the only thing that was different from other people. I remember, the biggest one to me, the one I really thought was the one that was just horrible. The one I'm friends with now, (the nice one) we have been friends for years. Yes, like I said, the one I thought that was the one was from the age of 15 till probably 19.

Sarah: so, that was the worst one, you said he hit you and locked you in?

Grace: Yeah, he hit and pushed me about and he was very controlling, but at the same time, it was such fun and so nice, and I just thought I am not going to get this with anyone else. I still even now in this happy relationship don't have the immature fun things we did then. But I think the caring and loving he genuinely loves me, but I think it makes up for what I thought was fun. If that makes sense?

Sarah: yes yes it totally makes sense.

Grace: I remember once in public I remember one evening we all had the same group of friends and the one I am with at the moment was stood near us and I just spoke and I obviously wasn't meant to speak before him; "shut the fuck up you slag" ... Just out of nowhere I had not done or said anything that made him look bad or was horrible I just spoke in general and he obviously didn't want me to speak and he just snapped, and it was instant.

Grace discursively locates the abuse as normal and inevitable as she states, *'even in a normal relationship you still got here, and they would be horrible'*. For Grace, this normalisation framed relationships as 'happy' in public but that everyone went through the same experiences 'behind closed doors'. The incongruity of the situation is evident when Grace describes the situation and her feelings: *'Yeah he hit and pushed me about and he was very controlling, but at the same time, it was such fun and so nice'*. This demonstrates the contradictory nature of abuse disguised as love.

This example of the exertion of gendered power and control, and 'doing' gender within a peer group is evident in the statement *'I obviously wasn't meant to speak before him...he obviously didn't want me to speak'*; Grace even clarified having not *'done or said anything that made him look bad'*, suggesting that if she had said something bad or horrible she would have been to blame and therefore deserved to be treated in such a way in front of her peers. This reveals a worrying level of acceptability of abusive behaviour, clearly gendered with the deployment of the word *'slag'*. Grace's example is a clear case of the performativity of gendered romantic relationships in a peer's context.

Pregnancy as a risk factor:

All the young women in my research with one exception, shared that they had been pregnant at some point in their abusive relationships. Ruby shared that *'the first time he hit me was when I was pregnant'*, demonstrating the clear association between pregnancy and the onset of DVA she describes how the relationship had quickly moved from 'love' to needing a place of refuge when she was pregnant. Where abuse is already being perpetrated, research shows that gender inequalities impact on a young woman's autonomy over sexual intimacy (Coy et al, 2010) and her choice of contraception; there is also little or no choice around the continuation or termination of a pregnancy. The narratives shared by the young women in my research supports the concept of 'low power' (Volpe et al: 2013): that there is an absence of power in relation to young women's sexual and reproductive rights in abusive relationships. I asked Jessica about her experience of being a teenager, DVA and her pregnancy:

Sarah: What was the relationship like when you were pregnant?

Jessica: It all got a bit worse...

Sarah: Was he violent towards you when you were pregnant?

Jessica: (Long pause) Ummm. Not as such, not physically, but mentally...

Jessica's narrative highlights the potential escalation of DVA, 'It all got a bit worse' whilst pregnant, although there may be a change in the type of abuse experienced, in this case a cessation in physical violence, replaced by being 'mentally' violent.

Intersectionality of risk:

I have looked at risk factors to understand how they contribute to framing the participants in my research. In terms of social class, from what was shared it could be surmised that five out of the seven participants could be termed as 'working' class and two as middle class; however, this is not a lens I applied. All of the young women were white British. All were in heterosexual relationships. Risk factors such as homelessness played a part, but this appeared to be the result of neglect and adverse childhood experiences. I could have chosen multiple extracts from each participant's narratives with which to illustrate the complexity and intersectionality of their experiences such were the multifaceted narratives they shared. However, I present here an extract from Sam's interview to illustrate how this complexity compounds intersecting risk that impacted her life and vulnerability to DVA.

Sarah: So, were social services involved with you when you were a teenager?

Sam: No, when I was a child, right up until I was 14, cos, well it was the courts that were involved. My mum and my step dad, well it was my step dad that was controlling her, this is going to be a long old story (laughs), anyway, he tried stopping my real dad from seeing me, he was controlling and abusive, and he used to get my mum to say "oh he's upset that you don't want him to adopt you" and all that shit. So anyway, I had a guardian to sort out contact and all that. So, no social services didn't actually get involved until the guardian stepped in and said, "there's something not right going on here". My dad reported him, my neighbours reported him (step dad) and people on the street reported him, but social services didn't want to know, they didn't care, they let me down, they did and then they paraded all over my life.

Sarah: So, your family knew the situation.

Sam: Yeah, all my family knew what he was doing to my mum, but they couldn't do anything about it. You can't help someone if they don't want it, if that makes sense?

Sarah: Yes, total sense. So, what was it like when you went to secondary school?

Sam: well, he had stopped hitting me, but he would still threaten me and try to force feed me. If I didn't want to eat, he would smoosh it in my face. He would threaten to rip my belly bar out, he slit his arm in front of me; so emotional abuse, then run upstairs with blood everywhere and locked himself in my little sisters' bedroom, so I was going crazy, bearing in mind he had a knife. The police came, they left, I don't know what he said, but he didn't get arrested. He got away with it every time. I would be sat outside in the freezing cold and people would literally come over to me and ask if I was all right," you alright?" (Affecting an attentive voice). He could see people coming over to me, but he blatantly didn't care. He chucked a bucket of cold water over me. Someone came along and gave me a coat. He even managed to convince the Guardian that he should have my sisters, even though my mum and him were on child protection. I sat there and poured my heart out to her and told her everything that that man had ever done to me. She said, "yeah must be awful, I get you I understand you, that can't be very nice" bearing in mind I was still quite young, the next thing I know, "oh here you go, we think you should have the kids!" He is such a good dad, he is so caring. When I was at court before, they wanted my family history and that; even the Guardian who was right for him was still saying "why an earth has he got parental custody. I thought because that's what "your company" or whatever, thought was best.

Sarah: did you ever talk to your mum about it?

Sam: No, she was never home. I literally spent my life on my own. When she was home, they were too busy arguing and falling out. I used to go to sleep every night listening to them shout. He put her out of the house at 1 o'clock in the morning and locked the door. Bearing in mind I had school the next day.

Sarah: Have you spoken to your mum about it now?

Sam: no not really. I personally don't blame her for what happened; I know what he was doing to her. I know it's hard. Basically when I was going through the courts and they were trying to adopt my daughter, I asked if anybody in the family could have her, my mum said she would have her, they did an assessment on her and turned around and said no she hadn't kept her child safe from abuse, how would she be able to keep my daughter safe from abuse, which I thought was so cruel. I know deep down she probably blames herself. When we do talk about it, she says she hates him.

Sam's story of childhood trauma provides an insight in to one young woman's experience, and how this played out in her relationship with her own mother,

and the risk of losing her daughter through DVA. Through being a victim of DVA Sam was constructed as 'vulnerable' and subsequently as a 'bad mother', narratives that she tried to resist and disrupt. This happened against a backdrop of multiple risk factors, particularly of experiencing coercive control, emotional and physical abuse as a child and as a young woman. Sam infers neglect as her mum was absent, and that her mum and stepdad both accepted and modelled a violent and abusive relationship, as though this were normal. Indeed, Sam implies that it was normal for her family. Sam also describes a broader situation community and institutional response, (in the family, the neighbourhood and in social services), however, the support systems intended to protect her, and her sisters were either negligent or unable to intervene. Yet these same services worked against her when her own daughter's safety came into question. These interlinked, complex and multiple risk factors intersect to form a narrative of both 'normality' of abusive relationships, and the inevitability of repeating situations.

As by way of introduction to the young women's narratives I have situated them within known risk factors to examine elements that contributed to their experiences of DVA. The risks were initially unravelled and taken as independent factors, however an example was given to highlight the multiple, overlapping, and interconnected nature of risk factors. Gender is incontestably THE fundamental risk factors intersecting with structural and positional factors such as age, age gap, pregnancy, family and peer violence to further complexify risk.

All the young women in my research had experienced DVA, and/or child abuse in their first families, giving weight to the theory of intergenerational violence, suggesting that this reinforces and normalises violence and abuse both as a script of individualisation and as a script of romantic love. The importance of interventions that limit and support risk factors from adverse childhood experiences is crucial. This highlights that part of a range of interventions can sit within the context of education. If attention is paid to the fact that the first family is the primary site of socialisation and learning it is necessary to provide a space in which to challenge and enable alternative ways of understanding and defining relationships, so that young people are free from the confining discourses that many young people encounter in their first family. If we consider

the level of DVA in contemporary society and the impact on young people, this rupture arguably needs to come from a potential safe space. The aim of this thesis is to examine the extent and ways in which education could and should be used to break and disrupt such narratives that lead young women to believe that such destructive and abusive relationships are what they can expect and deserve. I now move on to explore the young women's experiences of domestic violence and abuse in their own relationships.

Chapter Six: Exploring Experiences of Abuse

This chapter explores the young women's experiences of domestic violence and abuse. The stories shared are examined through the lens of the cross governmental definition in able to scrutinise it's utility in regard to younger women's experiences. I will go on to challenge the definition in relation to age, all of the young women were under the age of sixteen; therefore, the experiences fell outside of the age range of the definition. Arguably this positions young women and their experiences as undetectable and subsequently unacknowledged and invisible, hidden within a dominant discourse that defines love and abuse as undefined for this group of young women.

As I stated in the introduction, trying to define this area is problematic. Through the discursive aspects shared by the young women in their interviews, this problematic was evident in the confusion about what DVA actually was; what it looked like, and how to name it, with physical violence being the signifier of domestic violence. We will come on to discuss how these experiences are made sense of in the subsequent chapter, but firstly I explore the young women's experiences. Arguably the telling of a contextual and situated experience does not need to be named to enable it to be described. The interview with Grace is an example of the confusion for young people in naming the experience of domestic violence:

Grace: when I heard the term domestic violence, I didn't think that was me, because I thought that violence was all about physically hitting you and I went through a bit of that, but definitely the emotional side of it was just as bad for me. I would just rather he punched me. I can deal with a bruise, but the long dragged out torture of making you feel the way they make you feel. I think the term violence was something that made me feel like it wasn't me; it was a lot more about other things. In the last one he intimidated me, he had all of his old chef knives in a case in his wardrobe and he would get them and talk about how big they were and how sharp they were and how some of them were used to cut the bone. That kind of stuff is quite scary, and the word violence isn't that in my head.

Sarah: I totally understand what you're saying, what term describes it best for you?

Grace: I think its best when people say domestic abuse to think about the wider things in my head. He used to lock me in, that's not violence but it's

very scary, and if someone said, 'is someone putting you through domestic violence?' at that point I would have said no.

Grace highlights what many victim/survivors have argued; that the term 'domestic violence' does not speak to them or of their experiences. Arguably nothing 'speaks' as it is silenced; even when it does speak of violence it is not seen or understood as such as it does not encompass the range of their experiences. However, this was not the case for all the young women, and I have stated my case in the introduction chapter regarding my take up of the broader use of 'domestic violence and abuse', DVA.

Although there are specific categories and types of abuse there is a difficulty in trying to quantify and qualify such behaviour and often, they do not present as one aspect, but overlap and blur. Where there is a presence of one type, there is a high likelihood of there being another form of abuse; or all may be intertwined. One type of behaviour may underpin another, and the threat of violence is enough to make any of the others possible, this is an aspect of coercive control that aids in the blurring of lines, making the unacceptable acceptable, even expected.

Physical violence:

All the young women experienced physical violence, some experienced conditions I would describe as life threatening and extreme enough to require urgent medical attention. Threats of violence, after experiencing physical violence, were deployed to underpin further abuse, becoming normalised. A mechanism for control where a subtle 'look' comment or gesture became a signifier of the potential carnage possible; simultaneously invisible and omnipresent. The physical abuse described throughout the interviews did not play a major part in the telling of any of the young women's stories, even when what was described was incredibly stark and frightening. The range of experiences involved: pushing, slapping, biting, burning, branding, kicking, punching, pinching, squeezing, choking, and the use of weapons including household implements and animals. This excerpt from Sadie's story follows on from her talking about being hit with a baseball bat:

Sadie: He got a killer dog, he always beats the dog and he also used the dog to scare me, he would get it to bark at me.... He had a gun under the bed and one time he held it to my head that really scared me. And the bat, he would put that to my head and try and scare me again. And like

he was always trying to do that...but then I would always go back to him, cos I loved him.

Sarah: Did you try to tell anyone?

Sadie: no, I didn't. I just thought it was normal.

This example explores the implicit and very real threat of the use of weapons (in any form). In any other situation such behaviour would be considered entirely unacceptable. But Sadie's story develops to normalise the use of weapons (baseball bat and gun,) and a dog, in the perpetration of violence as a typical part of her relationship, making this incoherent situation coherent through drawing on the discourse of the dark romance by stating; '*I loved him*' and by normalising what arguably is far from normal, but for Sadie she states '*I just thought it was normal*'.

Sexual Violence:

The World Health Organisation defines sexual violence as "any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person's sexuality using coercion." (2002). There are many variations to this definition, however due to the constraints of the thesis a full discussion is not possible. All of the young women, except for one, described experiences which included sexual violence, however the term sexual violence or 'rape' was never used as Stanley (1988) found in her ground-breaking research, this is underlined by Grace's story:

Grace: I only knew that he had really upset me, not that he had scared me, he wasn't, I don't know, I think maybe because I've known him all my life, he's my brother's friend, I didn't think this guy could kill me, because I knew he is my brother's friend I guess...we saw each other all the time and I just thought there's that something... like... that could harm me. It's like when you're really really little you have a crush on the older person, and I think I was infatuated (I think that's the word?) And I think he knew that and took advantage. He knew how much I liked him, and he played on it because he knew I wouldn't want to get him in any trouble; I guess he promised me everything, well until he got what he wanted and then I fell for it I guess, three times. But I lost my virginity to him and I don't know whether it's just girls but it's a big thing and I thought because he promised me that we were going to be together when I was 16 and that everyone could know that we were together; he was talking long term, and looking back I was only 14 I should know that he was only saying that but I didn't... And then it carried on like that for a few months. I don't know, he tried to be pushy or forcing me and I had to physically fight him off for maybe 15 minutes to half an hour, but I walked away and as I walked away, I felt a lot stronger.

Grace described her experience and tries to make sense of it: *'I only knew that he had really upset me, not that he had scared me'*; this is interesting framing, being fearful, but not 'knowing' it, maybe due to being constrained by her 'infatuation' and the fallacy of 'known men' to be trustworthy; when the weight of evidence points to the contrary. Grace's trust constructs her virginity as 'lost' rather than 'taken', so that rape or sexual assault is not named even in her description of an attempted sexual assault, as he *'tried to be pushy or forcing me'*; requiring her physical resistance for up to half an hour. In this case Grace discursively constructs an agentic self, able to *'walk away'* which engendered a sense of empowerment as she states that leaving made her feel *'much stronger'*; when arguably she had just been physically *'fighting him off'*. This discourse has the power to normalise sexual assault. The narrative of promises: *'I guess he promised me everything...he promised we were going to be together when I was 16, he was talking long term'*. This provides evidence of the fairy tale discourse; of romantic love and the 'happily ever after'. Grace blames herself again, however it's a contradictory positioning *'looking back I was only 14'*; a young woman who had trust in a family friend who promised her 'everything'; however, she goes on to state *'I should know that he was only saying that but I didn't'*, this incoherence and self-blame is also apparent in the statement *'he got what he wanted and then I fell for it I guess'*.

Sadie's narrative of sexual violence demonstrates how sexual regulation can then be used to underpin other forms of violence and abuse and compromise power in the relationship:

Sadie: then he'd want sex again after a while so I said, 'I've had enough', and he calls me a slag if I didn't do it and he'd get moody. This one time I just said, 'I don't want to do it' and he kind of hit me and he hit me on the side of the head. I said, 'what was that for?' [he said] 'I was only having a laugh with you' and I said 'I didn't really find it very funny', but I just laughed it off and said 'oh yeah'...then we had sex again and it was like what was the point of that and it was like that from then on, it was always like I had to have sex. He would do this thing; 'right' he'd say, and like put his fingers in me and that to check if I'd slept with anyone else he said 'oh if it's a bit wide' he'd be able to tell if it was a bit slack up there he could tell I'd slept with someone so he'd do it and say 'right yeah, that's fine, yes you haven't slept with anybody'. He said he could tell if I was lying. Even knowing that I hadn't but I'd still get scared that he maybe thought that I did so thinking 'what if he finds out that I slept with someone' even though I haven't, I had the thought that if I did sleep with

someone, it scared me so much, in my mind I kept thinking I did sleep with somebody, but I never did.

Sadie minimises the experience of physical violence when she states, *'he kind of hit me'*, arguably being hit is being hit, but to make sense of this Sadie had to minimise the situation and provide a contradictory position to enable a sense of coherence. She simultaneously *'laughed it off'* whilst maintaining *'I didn't really find it very funny'*. She also states *'I had to have sex'*; rather than using language that frames it as abusive, *'had to'* implies coercion or force. Sadie's narrative is contradictory and struggles to be congruent. The gendered sexual regulation is reinforced by sexual, physical and emotional abuse, to the point that Sadie doubts her own mind *'in my mind I kept thinking I did sleep with somebody, but I never did'*.

Sarah: So, you began to feel paranoid?

Sadie: yeah, always thinking yeah, like when I went to his, you know, that I'm not right down there anymore, like I'm fine, like I will get away with it, I never slept with anybody, but in his mind I did and in my mind I started to believe that I did, even though I didn't and it was fine every time I'd get away with it and he'd be like 'yes fine' and I'd say 'see I told you I wouldn't do it, you're my boyfriend, I wouldn't do that to you' and he goes 'yeah I know, I love you' and kisses me and then I go like '...He'd call me slag and say that I smell that I don't brush my teeth and stuff like that and I would be like what, I hope I'm you know, like hope I'm right down there I was really depressed I was thinking why did he have to be so mean I can't understand that I never did anything like that to him, he just didn't care. But he always said that he loved me and wanted to be together for ever and that we would have a family.

Doubting her own mind and blaming herself, Sadie defended her position rather than challenging his, stating *'see I told you I wouldn't do it, you're my boyfriend'*. The impact on Sadie meant that she was feeling depressed and was trying to understand why he behaved like that, when she did not behave in a similar way. In trying to make sense of the senseless Sadie appears to fully accept the dark romance narrative, constructing his violent and abusive behaviour as *'mean'*, thereby minimising the experience and providing a logic to it through his blanket term of love and promises of a 'future': *'he always said that he loved me and wanted to be together for ever and that we would have a family'*. Accepting the popular discourse of love and its lure of a happily ever after allowed her to 'do' this relationship. Sadie continues:

Sadie: ...again he'd force me into sex, and he was always going on, I felt sick, I was having morning sickness, but I didn't know. I didn't know I was pregnant; I couldn't have sex with him. I'd say, 'I feel really sick I can't do this I can't have sex'. I just wanted to throw up and he was like 'what's wrong with you; are you pregnant or something?' I said 'no I been on my period, what you on about, I can't be pregnant, and he was saying 'okay' but I still had sex with him even if I didn't want to and I wanted to throw up. I had sex five times in a day, and it was horrible.

Sadie's story demonstrates the lack of power and the performative nature of heteronormativity. The experience of being forced to have sex was again not discursively constructed in expressions of rape or sexual violence, but rather as a reinforcement of relationship rules through micro regulation and the use of previous violence, threats, emotional and psychological abuse. Sadie defines her partner's violent and abusive behaviour as 'being mean', shoring this up is her notion of love, really demonstrating that for Sadie anything can be done and excused in the name of 'love', as she struggles with a narrative with which to elucidate her understandings in any other way, demonstrating the clear lack of available discourse to discursively construct these experiences as violent and abusive.

Emotional and psychological abuse:

Within the cross governmental definition 'emotional' and 'psychological' abuse are both included, however, they are often used interchangeably, and the differences are arguably very subtle in their application, experience and impact. In brief 'emotional' abuse refers to something relating to or pertaining to a person's emotions; whilst psychological abuse is abusive behaviour that relates to abusing a person's mind. Abusive behaviour relating to either may take several forms including verbal abuse (shouting, name-calling and blaming), neglect, isolation, humiliation, threats, insults, excessive criticism, rejection, intimidation and/or domination, manipulation or any other treatment which may diminish the sense of identity, dignity, and self-worth. The results often lead to reduced self esteem and confidence, anxiety, depression, self-harm and suicide. All the young women experienced both of these types of abuse and all of them stated clearly or alluded to the fact that it was 'as bad' or 'worse' than any of the other abusive aspects, as these excerpts from Katie, Jessica, Sam and Sadie validate:

Katie: They know how to use their heads to get into your head.

This quote identifies the aspect of choice that people who use emotional and psychological abuse have and implies that it is a clever and calculating choice at that. Jessica's quote recognises the 'clever' manipulation and describes discursive interactions to reject such abuse. Although is left with conflicting feelings:

Jessica: Cos, He like twists things; because I have a history of mental health issues within my family. He says 'you're crazy, your paranoid' I will say 'I am paranoid because you lie and you've cheated, and then you lie about certain situations, and your story changes several times about that one incident, I may seem paranoid, and I ask questions, and then when you start to knock me and laugh at me, I am going to get really angry, like you know what's going to happen, it's a constant cycle, and you constantly do it, you could change that cycle by being honest. It's like every time, you make me crazy'. After it I think to myself, I could have handled it better, but then I think NO! It's like anyone would feel like that."

Jessica initially takes on the victim blaming discourse and blames herself: 'After it I think to myself I could have handled it better, but then is able to challenge and reject the limiting discourse resisting with self-talk, stating 'but then I think NO!' and offers herself an alternative 'It's like anyone would feel like that' to reject the normalisation of the abuse.

Sadie describes the experience, whilst Sam identifies the impact:

Sadie: It was fine, but he was always like 'you're a slag', and saying 'nobody likes you' he said 'if I wasn't with you, nobody else would go out with you', and that 'nobody else would want me' ... he just put me down a lot.

Sam: All forms of abuse are just as bad, just depends, I think it is the effect after. Say you were beaten up so badly you couldn't walk again, that's really bad. But the emotional stuff, if they are messing with your mind. That takes a lot of healing as well.

All the young women's stories support what is known about emotional and psychological abuse of adult women; how it is enacted and how it is often through gendered micro regulation and processes that invoke the performance of gendered roles whereby abuse is concealed.

Financial abuse:

Financial abuse, like all other forms, is used by abusers to gain and maintain power and control in a relationship. In adult women's relationships it may take many forms which may be subtle or overt. There is a myriad of ways in which

finances can be used and abused; from withholding money or giving a limited 'allowance', controlling how all money is spent, forbidding or sabotaging the survivor/ victim's work, to running up large amounts of debt and stealing money. This list is in no way comprehensive; rather it is indicative of the types of abuses that occur. This kind of abuse used in an adult relationship may be a tactic to entrap a woman in a relationship. It is thought to occur across all socio-economic, educational, ethnic groups, and regardless of sexuality, as are other forms of abuse. Financial abuse is the least known about form of abuse as it is arguably a highly gendered area of domestic life (Phal, 1989). Even less is known about young people and the dynamics of financial abuse. Ruby and Sam were both under 16 when they experienced financial abuse and Grace was just over 16, Ruby talked about two very different aspects of financial abuse and how they played out in her experience:

Ruby: the hardest part was feeling something for him, and we would talk and be all lovey-dovey, and then the next thing I knew, he was calling me a cunt. It was horrible; I just didn't have any control. I was trying to fix things, but he was just giving me abuse, he would take money out of my purse, and top up using my details and I had like £260 in the Bank and he took it out. So, he would just take everything I had. When I thought he cared about me and the baby? We don't talk now. It was really hard. We went from speaking nearly every day to (pause) I would speak to him every four months then (pause) nothing.

The contradictions are evident in Ruby's narrative; as she states, 'I just didn't have any control', to 'I was trying to fix things', suggesting that she was trying to be agentic in this situation, but 'he was just giving me abuse'. Even though she thought that he cared about her and the baby, 'he would just take everything I had'. In trying to 'fix things' it demonstrates Ruby's perceived responsibility for the situation and the relationship and that she had some power to control it, however the abuse overrides the ability to be agentic. Ruby also experienced a different form of financial abuse, in that she was used to legitimise and lend credibility to acts of fraud:

Ruby: I would go to the shops with him and he was making payments and things. I think I was (pause) I don't know (pause) I had to look older, I think that's why I liked it, I wanted to look nice and have high heels and have someone look after me.

At this point Ruby was 15 years old and very vulnerable, so that the chance to dress like a 'princess' and look nice for her prince was enticing. She states that

she liked it and appeared to view it as part of the 'happily ever after' narrative, of being looked after. Even in hindsight Ruby appeared to talk about it wistfully with a sense of romanticism. This is not echoed by Sam:

Sam: Because if you don't, when erm... (Long pause) you haven't taken heroin for ages, you get really bad withdrawal, so he would say "oh I'm in pain, my stomach hurts..." I never ever went and got it for him, but I did give him the money, and if I didn't give him the money, he would take my stuff, and because I was so desperate to keep my stuff, I would give him some money. He would steal my bank card, and everything. Dickhead. That's so low.

In clarification of her role in her partners' drug use, Sam states that she never 'went and got it for him' but as she had little power, she gave him money for it. This reveals Sam's sense of responsibility for him, and for his 'fragile self' that was in pain. It may be that she was using the power she had through money to protect her 'stuff' or a complicating of the two. Her assessment in hindsight clearly rejects responsibility and places it firmly on him, calling him a 'dickhead' and her assessment of his behaviour as 'so low'.

The term 'financial abuse' is certainly not a term that is in young people's everyday language, but through the narrative examples it is clear to see it performed in a myriad of ways. Ruby's statements places the financial abuse against a backdrop of care; 'love' and feeling looked after, complicating her feelings about both her partner and his behaviour. Retrospectively, Sam is able to see the unacceptable nature of her partner's behaviour, yet at the time she continued to fund his heroin habit as a protective measure for herself and her belongings. Like all abusive relationships, for Sam and Ruby, as with all the young women in my study, their feelings, ideas about 'love' and care, and hope that things would improve, intersected with abusive behaviour complicating, compounding and reinforcing gendered scripts of 'doing heterosexual love'.

Grace's example below demonstrates the power and control that can be exerted when a relationship has ended and the financial abuse that can still be enacted; this left Grace in a financially difficult position which was still having a profound effect on her life, thankfully however, this did not keep her trapped in the relationship.

Grace: He kept sort of like saying 'if you're with me you'll keep your job. He was like using my job.

Sarah: so, did you have to leave your job in the end?

Grace: yeah, I got the sack in the end, he told them. The first thing he did was told them. I rang up one morning and told them I had been sick, and it happened to be a Sunday morning and I started work at 6am in the morning, so really early, but I had been sick through the night and then rang them up at four in the morning and said that I won't be coming in. But unfortunately, his manager is my manager at that time in the morning and they are friends.... he told my manager that he had seen me out drinking the night before, which was rubbish.

Grace's narrative provides confirmation of the financial mechanisms by which perpetrators exert power and control that may keep women entrapped. As Grace did not have children, it was easier for her to be agentic and she made a choice to leave him despite the impact on her ability to financially sustain herself, therefore it was not without consequence.

Coercive control:

In 2015 the term 'coercive control' was added to the legal definition of domestic violence and abuse, to incorporate patterns of extreme psychological and emotional abuse. This form of abuse is often underpinned by physical and sexual aggression (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Lloyd & Emery, 1994), but its insidious nature perpetrated through often imperceptible changes, entwined with gendered scripts has been problematic to understand and define. The deployment of this term has undoubtedly enabled a broader yet more nuanced understanding of DVA extended by the work of Stark (2007). Stark argues that there is a paradox in that the singular focus on violence against women has failed to deal with DVA; either in holding perpetrators to account or in keeping women safe and that it is masking the reality of a far greater problem. Stark argues through a form of gendered 'entrapment' men can use gendered micro regulation to extend their dominance endangering women's everyday freedoms. High levels of control are a greater indicator of homicide than physical violence, as Poletta states; "men who were most likely to kill their partners were not those who were the most violent; it was those who were the most controlling" (2009: 1491). The subtleties of coercive control are also being employed in young people's relationships with the same impact as evidenced by two homicide reviews in 2016 (Barter, 2017).

All of the young women described facets of controlling behaviour that may pertain to many abusive relationships, although there may be specific ways

associated with controlling young women in relationships. Arguably many young women do not share a domestic space; my data demonstrates that this is not clear cut when there are deprivations and vulnerabilities such as homelessness for either of the partners in the relationship, despite their age. This is also challenged in families that may present as chaotic, so that young people move in with other families. The idea that young people are not ensnared in financial commitments is also challenged as finances are used as a form of abuse in this younger age group.

The threads that weave through the data suggest that the stories in my research are familiar to those of older women, with control being maintained over many aspects of young women's lives; and these specifically impact on gendered notions of embodiment and what is deemed both appropriate and inappropriate ways of doing 'girl', often dichotomised by the; princess/wicked witch; Madonna/ whore script. The other key area and mechanism in coercive control is that of isolation, so that the appropriateness of time, place, friends and family are decided on by the perpetrator and the micro regulation of physical presentation. Sadie's narrative epitomises this micro regulation and presentation of how to 'do girl':

Sadie: My self-confidence was just going down and down and down by the day and I had like no self-confidence. I felt vulnerable, I changed my hair. He likes my hair blonde, he would say "do your hair extensions like this, do this make up that make up, with this top show this/that short skirts so I looked like a proper slapper. I'll be wearing a top to just go just under my boobs. It was a shame I didn't want to feel like that, and I just did it, just to impress him. He would tell me how to do my hair. I'd go there to do it and then he would tell me to do it again or take it out.

The way Sadie narrates this part of her story is with a visible sign of disgust and a sense of shame. His control over what she wore and how she presents her physical self, appears like a sexualised caricature; Sadie describes her appearance 'short skirts... a top to just go just under my boobs', and states: 'I looked like a proper slapper', positioning herself as a woman whose sexual behaviour is considered inappropriate and thereby maintaining the heterosexualised persona. Sadie starts with how she felt; feeling vulnerable and lacking confidence and the contradiction in not wanting to 'feel like that' but blaming herself in stating 'I just did it', 'to impress him'. In analysing Sadie's story, the chaos and contradictions are evident.

Grace also describes her experience of this micro regulation and the impact this had:

Grace: I wasn't allowed to wear make up to work or do my hair for work and if I did, I was cheating or something or he would wonder why I was doing what I was doing. He was like the only one that took over my brain and it was scary how much I was thinking "yeah it is my fault". The things he was saying and doing was really horrible and threatening and he was trying to make me feel the way I was feeling but it was definitely the scariest I think because he was older, and I know it sounds stupid but bigger and stronger he just scared me the most.

Sarah: that really isn't stupid, it sounds scary.

Grace: he just scared me the most out of them. I was with someone; from the point as I said like exam time at school for three years. He would hit me and throw me about and lock me in and go out with the keys ... things like that... but I didn't... I wasn't scared of losing my life if that makes sense. I just thought this is the worst that it got, and it wasn't life-threatening, although it was horrible, but it wasn't life-threatening. But the last one, I literally didn't go to sleep at night. I would lie there with my eyes open trying to relax because if I didn't, I didn't know what might happen and I know it sounds stupid.

Sarah: it really doesn't sound stupid to me; it sounds very sensible in that situation.

Grace: (laughs) but yes so he was definitely the scariest, I can't exactly pinpoint why but I think he just let me know that he was dangerous if that makes sense and he wanted me to know that, and believe it, obviously, now I've got out of the situation and he hasn't done half the things he said he would do and now I do feel a little bit stupid for believing the things he said he would do as he hasn't done the things he said he was going to do. So, I just think why didn't I just not listen and I could have got out of there sooner.

Grace describes the fact that she was not allowed to wear makeup or do her hair and that if she did this was a signifier of infidelity, so that jealousy was an understandable reason for his concerns about her appearance. Grace identifies the way in which coercive control was able to be effective, so that the gendered script of love and Grace being responsible was enacted. She describes the process: 'He was like the only one that took over my brain and it was scary how much I was thinking "yeah it is my fault". Although, the confusion is evident when this is challenged by Grace stating, 'I can't exactly pinpoint why but I think he just let me know that he was dangerous if that makes sense and he wanted me to know that and believe it'. Grace's attempts to reject are not maintained as she is unable to recreate an alternative she goes on to blame herself for

believing the things he said he would do to her if she left, things that made her unable to sleep at night and that she was fearful of losing her life, as 'he was dangerous'. So, rather than blame the perpetrator for the abuse Grace blames herself for believing the frightening and very real threats he made.

Isolation is another powerful weapon enacted through coercive control; gendered surveillance and boundary maintenance implemented through physical and other forms of segregation allow for a greater level of control; reducing support networks and increasing vulnerabilities by strengthening the loneliness and dependence. Sadie and Katie both talked about who they were 'allowed' to see:

Sarah: so, you didn't keep in contact with any of your friends at that time?

Sadie: no, it was...I just didn't talk to them because I wasn't allowed friends ok; he didn't like me hanging out with anybody else. He would go mad if I was with boys, I couldn't hang out with any friends.

Both had talked about being at the partner's house with his mother:

Katie: I used to sit in his mum's house everyday with his mum, I wasn't allowed to talk to anyone, I wasn't allowed to talk to his brother, or any men, if I was to talk to any men, I would get a slap.

Whilst the partners were often out with other girls/ women:

Katie: I wasn't allowed to do nothing, but he could go out every day, and go see his exes and his kids with his exes, he would come back with scratches on his back.

Sarah: And you weren't allowed to go out?

Katie: No way.

So, isolation from friends and family had a gendered aspect to it, so that as Sadie shared: 'He would go mad if I was with boys' or as Katie states: 'if I was to talk to any men, I would get a slap'. Katie also endured her partner going out to see his ex's and children whilst she was with his mum and not allowed to go out.

Escalation:

Whatever form it takes, evidence suggests that DVA escalates regardless of how hard victims/survivors try to manage or disrupt this behaviour; ultimately DVA is about power and control and therefore the lack of it for the

victims/survivors; resulting in disempowerment and a lack of control over many/any/all aspects of one's self and life. Escalation may result in more frequent and more damaging incidents that may be more overt, with less masquerading; with consequentially deleterious effects. It is stated that young people's relationships typically escalate more quickly than adults (Barter et al, 2009). It is thought that this may be due to the duration and transient nature of relationships for young people, and arguably it may be a lack of knowledge and the level of acceptability of DVA that appears to be evident in young and first relationships.

Grace's story illustrates her experience of escalation and the speed and intensity of acceleration of abuses in her relationship:

Sarah: what has been the worst experience for you?

Grace: he is definitely the worst even though it's the shortest it literally took him two weeks.

Sarah: to turn from a really nice guy?

Grace: oh, he made sure he was still really nice, but I started seeing the horrible bits like quite fast...scared the life out of me, it was the one made me think 'this is abusive and I really am in trouble if I stay with him'.

Sarah: so, you had in your head that this was abuse and it was scary?

Grace: yeah, I could see the signs and I mentioned it to my counsellor, but I didn't think much of it, but she said it sounds like you are in danger and I think you should talk to the domestic violence services and they gave me leaflets and information on the signs and signals. Things to look out for and signs, and he just ticked every box! I thought 'oh my God' and even the things I thought that maybe were nice. And they all do it and there is a reason for it, and it was all like I was reading about him and it just got worse and worse and worse. Whether it was because he realised that I was realising, if that makes sense?

Sarah: yes, totally.

Grace: I think he upped it quite fast I think because I realised quite fast, he was like 'oh dear she's been here before'.

Arguably Grace had been in other abusive relationships and had some support and 'education' she was more 'aware' of the signs and was in a position of understanding therefore once she recognised the behaviour and was able to voice her concerns, she was able to access help and reject the dominant scrip

of love. As she states in looking at a list of the 'red flags': 'he just ticked every box and I thought 'oh my God''; this opened up the possibility of further rupturing the fairy tale discourse, when Grace adds 'and even the things I thought that maybe were nice'. Grace clearly exposes the abuse bound up in the dark romance discourse and is able to reject it. She highlights that 'he realised that I was realising'; and through the revealing of the fallacy of the discourse, a knowingness sense of agency, meant she was able to rupture the dominant discourse; however, this was met with an increase in the exertion of power. As Grace so insightfully states: 'I think he upped it quite fast, I think because I realised quite fast, he was like 'oh dear she's been here before'. This establishes the need for understanding behaviour as abusive and not couched in a veneer of love, and Grace having been informed about the red flags was able to identify the behaviour as abusive and dangerous and reject the discourse that supports it. She goes further; in recognising that 'even the things I thought were nice' she is therefore able to rupture the fairy tale romance and identify the behaviour as abusive.

There may be an escalation in the violence and abuse that results in a separation of the relationship, as described by Grace above. Once the DVA is recognised and understood without its camouflage, as in this case, the victim/survivor may try to escape the abusive relationship. However, this is known to be *the most dangerous time* in a relationship characterised by DVA. It may be that for many, an attempt at separation has the effect of further escalation and threats to kill, or a change of tack that still represents a veiled escalation with threats of suicide on the part of the perpetrator, an illusion of the 'fragile self' that needs 'fixing'.

Separation:

The cross governmental definition identifies that DVA can continue long after the relationship ends, in stating '*who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members*'. However, popular discourse positions separation as the most effective and unproblematic solution to the problem of abusive relationships: "why don't they just leave", or "if that happened to me, I wouldn't put up with it".

This fallacy is supported by interwoven gendered narratives that blame the victim; so that the relationship is the responsibility of the victim/ survivor, even when it goes 'wrong' through the perpetration of someone else abuses. This is totally missing the intricacy of the gendered power relation, and that ultimately separation makes no concession for; Enander (2010) identifies this paradox:

"In the first case, women are made responsible for keeping families together, regardless of the individual cost. In the second case, women who are subjected to male violence are made responsible for solving this difficult social problem by the individual act of leaving" (p.2)

This makes evident the complex gendered nature and focus of responsibility in relationships. This discourse of responsibility weighs heavily on young women in abusive relationships, even if they are not the adult in the relationship! Young women are positioned as accountable for the relationship consequently making it difficult to end. Having deliberated the nature of love I have examined how it is interwoven through abuse as a normalised function of relationships; and to be endured. Even when DVA has been exposed there is a lack of available discourse on which to draw to make sense of the experience, therefore silence prevails; so even when exposed it is difficult to thwart.

The end of an abusive relationship does not signify an end to the abuse. Post separation DVA continues in all its forms with potentially stalking and harassment as an additional strategy. The Office for National Statistics (2017) demonstrates a clear trend in relation to 'partner abuse and heavily victimised groups', stating that, "Women who were aged 16 to 24 were more likely to experience sexual assault or stalking than women aged over 25" (ONS; 2017: 21), there are no figures available for those under 16. For all of the young women I interviewed, it was clear that the end of the relationship did not signify the end of the abuse, or their fear of abuse, as Ruby and Katie 's stories highlight:

Ruby: I ended up breaking up with him. He ended up getting chucked out because he threatened a friend of mine; I had to stay with her for a week after that. I can't remember what happened, he came to the door and kicked it in and was banging on it because I wouldn't talk to him... I think he actually gave me a fat lip, and then he kept trying to take my jumper off me to expose my tummy because he knows I have a real thing about it.

Sarah: do you worry about seeing him now?

Ruby: yes, I always do. I always think that I've seen him, I think always 'that's him', instantly my heart goes like that (waves hands around wildly), I went through so much, it scares me to see him, (long pause) it still does.

Sarah: so, you are still scared of him?

Ruby: yes, I am, yeah it reminds me of that night, I don't want to blame it all on him, but he just... I don't know... We don't work out, he wasn't a nice person, and he is very clever how he could do things.

Ruby experienced a continuation of physical violence after the end of the relationship; with the ex-partner kicking down her door and giving her a fat lip, and attempts at humiliating her to erode any remnant of self-confidence: 'he kept trying to take my jumper off me to expose my tummy because he knows I have a real thing about it'. Ruby also describes how she continues to be scared and fearful. Despite this evident level of fear of him and his behaviour, she wants to share the blame stating 'we don't work out'; normalising the relationship that doesn't work out, rather than as a result of DVA. Although this is then inferred as she states 'he wasn't a nice person' thereby separating him from the relationship. It could be interpreted that '*he is very clever how he could do things*'; is a way of saying that he is manipulative and devious rather than the general positive meaning of the word 'clever', arguably it is an attempt at resisting the responsibility for the abuse in the relationship.

Katie's narrative signals the enduring nature and power of DVA post separation:

Katie: There are small things, even at the beginning of a relationship, like I can see now, the way my ex talked to me, and how it was. Even now (18 months later) he texts and if I were to text back, he would think I was hooked, so it's really clear. I never text back; one day he might leave me alone.

Endings...

The end of any relationship can be traumatic, the loss of so much; characterised by so many conflicting and painful emotions. However, when the relationship has been violent or abusive it is potentially the most dangerous time for women. It is often at the end of relationships that the final need of the perpetrator to exert power and maintain control kicks in and it is this point that

has ended in threats to kill, that do lead to both suicide and homicide. It is crucial to remember two women a week are murdered on average every week in the UK. So, the threats that young women receive are founded in a blunt reality; so much so, that many stay in relationships for years as it is in fact, safer to do so. Below Grace describes the end of her relationship:

Grace: Every time I went into work [where he also worked] he would drag me into a corner and once he pulled me into a freezer and it was so cold, it was horrible. He tried everything to get me back; he tried threatening tactics, scaring me, saying "I'm going to do this and that to your friends and family". He tried "I'm going to kill myself". One morning he pulled me into the freezer and said he would kill me if I didn't get back with him. It's horrible to say that I just gave up and I said, "if you do that I can't do anything to stop you" and he said "right okay...this is it goodbye then" and he said "right if you don't get back with me right now I am going to do it". I just had to work hard on saying anything because once I was in that situation, I didn't know what would happen. He didn't do it obviously (laughs)... I was just so relieved. Although I didn't feel like I was right out of it I just didn't want to get back with him and I didn't even with the threats, it was just too scary, so thank God that kept me strong. He tried everything.

When Grace was finally able to end the relationship, she was threatened by her ex-partner at work and unable to tell anyone, her partner, also a colleague, was viewed as such a 'gentleman' and all round 'good guy'. Working in the same place as her partner enabled him to have access to her literally dragging her 'into a corner' and even 'into a freezer'. Despite feeling unable to ask for help, and still in a position of being threatened by him she was 'just so relieved' when she was finally out of the relationship. Grace was aware that 'although I didn't feel like I was right out of it'.... she very much wanted the relationship to be over, stating: 'I just didn't want to get back with him' because 'it was just too scary'. The threats of the perpetrator to kill himself reveal the 'fragile self' and many women, drawing on the discourses of being responsible for the relationship and for the partner may stay for years. When Grace states 'it was just too scary' in relation to staying in the relationship, this is the reason women may stay, they know that the threats to kill them or their children are founded in a reality; therefore, it is safer to stay.

Many of the experiences that were shared by the young women contained elements of all aspects of DVA as defined above. However, there was a preponderance of emotional abuse and coercive control, reinforced by physical

and sexual violence. In comparison, the body of research evidence on adult women to that of young women who access services have identified alarming levels of high severity abuse that are higher for the youngest age group (SAFELIVES 2017; Barter et al 2009); this is supported by my data. Financial abuse played a smaller part in their experiences, as one might expect, due to not being economically active however, it played a bigger part than anticipated in this age group.

All of the young women experienced a range of abuses and I have presented their stories within the current cross governmental definition to appreciate how this relates to what is known, and to extend understandings of this younger age group. So, although I have presented the young women's experiences in predefined categories to situate their experiences, it is important to understand the interconnected complexities of abuse and how one form of abuse is used to shore up another. Arguably, the type of abuse will depend on the context and the relationship and what mechanism of abuse is expedient for the perpetrator to gain and maintain power and control; often there is no clear delineation, which serves to further obscure the experience. Their experiences are resonant with those of adult victims/ survivors, but there is indication to suggest that there are nuances to these experiences specific to this younger age group and that certain aspects, such as financial abuse played a greater role than expected. Also, that abuse may escalate more rapidly and with higher levels of severity and possible death.

Arguably whilst the change that reduced the age to 16, was welcomed, it has not gone far enough in definitional terms. This is the only departure from the definition rendering this group vulnerable to increased invisibility. I now move on to thematically explore their experiences further; and their negotiation of the complexity of understanding in making sense of these experiences, and the opportunity to discursively reproduce, resist, reject or rupture the confining discourses.

Chapter Seven: Young women's voices: Making sense of relationships...

In this chapter I explore the young women's experiences and their understandings thematically, drawing on the theoretical aspects outlined in chapter two and underpinned by the literature review in chapter three enabling a further unravelling of the data.

Male Entitlement:

"Relationships in which women are abused are not unique but, rather, exemplify in extremis the stereotypical gender arrangements that structure intimacy between men and women" (Goldner et al, 1990: 343)

As the statement above frames; men who are aggressive toward women hold rigid beliefs about women and gender and their role within a romantic relationship. These may include a belief that women are weaker, less capable, worth less and that violence and abuse can shore up the gender boundary maintaining a particular system of gendered patterns and performances. Gender inequality is ubiquitous. Dominant forms of masculinity are hierarchically constructed around an assured entitlement, an indisputable right to something, which can be requested, but if refused; just taken. Male entitlement is a recurring theme throughout the young women's stories, in explicit and implicit reports and contested statements. This notion of entitlement demonstrates a flow of 'rights' without any responsibility. Katie's story contains many examples of her ex-partner's many other partners and children and she describes her positioning within a complex web of relationships and male entitlement whilst in hospital having just given birth to their child:

Katie: ...he came back for the visit, that same day he ran back to her I got a phone call from my social worker saying that he got arrested and that I needed to be on the lookout for the other girl. His pattern is that he just goes back to his exes although he is not allowed round to any of his exes. He is already on child protection; she didn't lose her kids or anything. Nothing has happened to them in the last 6 months, they are still walking around with their kids, playing happy families but he isn't allowed round children, not allowed round any of his kids.

Sarah: how many has he got?

Katie: five

Sarah: ok

Katie: all with different mums. He don't see any of them.

Katie describes 'his pattern', demonstrating a clear understanding of his behaviour whilst also being part of the pattern of 'exes'. Katie, having just given birth was warned that she needed to 'be on the 'look out' for another woman who may be violent towards her. This puts the responsibility for her welfare firmly back on Katie, rather than looking to those who perpetrate abuse. The notion of him 'playing happy families' appears to be both painful and ridiculous to her. This idea of 'playing'; an 'activity for enjoyment rather than any serious or practical purpose' is reinforced by the disclosure that 'he isn't allowed round children, not allowed round any of his kids'. In other words, he is not being a responsible father just 'playing' at it. Katie goes on to describe the situation further:

Katie: he never wanted to do anything about it, he just likes sleeping around and getting people pregnant, controlling, then finding the next girl. None of his exes could say no and none of us can say no. The exes would have him back. His first girlfriend, she eventually managed to get rid of him and she cut all ties her daughter is 8 now and she hasn't seen him in five years. I completely won't go back. Another of his exes she's just got her daughter back after four years, he has made everything awful, all of us have had social services, all of us have gone through the same thing, and we all lost our kids. He plays the best boyfriend in the world when you first get with him, he would tell you stories and I would be like 'wow he is amazing'. I would think 'wow he is so caring'. But now I think why would people lie for him? He is really clever.

This extract from Katie's story clearly describes a serial perpetrator and how through his male entitlement he has put many young women through the same violence and abuse, and this has resulted in so many women and children experiencing DVA, in fact, women losing their children; and the children losing their mothers. This one snap shot of a perpetrator's behaviour has a huge impact, the negative reverberations are potentially limitless when the impact of adverse childhood experiences are taken into account and in light of the risk factors discussed in Chapter eight. Katie states, '*he just likes sleeping around and getting people pregnant*' and identifies '*controlling*' as his way of achieving this; drawing on the feminist discourse of patriarchy that names the mechanism by which this is possible. This may be after the initial 'honeymoon' phase as Katie states '*He plays the best boyfriend in the world when you first get with him*', *I would be like 'wow he is amazing'. I would think 'wow he is so caring'*. This initial phase of romance is part of the cycle of abuse where romance is replaced by controlling and abusive behaviours. She emphasises '*I completely*

won't go back'; however, this is contradictory to earlier statements made regarding how difficult it is to stay away, as she would be concerned that she would be 'hooked'. Katie ends this part of her interview with *'He is really clever*. This clearly conjures up a picture of emotional abuse and how this is a premeditated tactic employed to gain power and control over women, but the term 'clever' is problematic as it is discursively employed to signify intelligence, so although it can be interpreted as a young woman understanding the devious, manipulative behaviour it is framed positively by the term 'clever'.

Male entitlement and negative cultural attitudes towards women underpinned the relationships described by my participants. For Jessica, this was apparent through the positioning of her partner as the main focus and as the decision maker in the relationship, and his friends' use of statements regarding gendered roles:

Sarah: So, are you saying it felt like it was all about him?

Jessica: yeah, and his friends are like, I don't know if it's a jokey thing or our society, but they are like "yeah, you're a man, you going to get her to do the housework?" (laughs) random. That's not going to happen!"

Jessica tries to make sense of this statement by drawing on the performed masculinity as a 'jokey' thing, or banter; but also questions it in a broader sense drawing on a patriarchal discourse regarding women's roles and position in society. She also laughs and states categorically, 'that's not going to happen!' thereby attempting to make sense of this and to resist and disrupt the gendered discourse of roles in romantic relationships.

The bad lad...Bastard...

"the contradictory feelings that many women survivors of domestic violence describe: loving the men but hating their violent behavior."
(Chung, 2007: 1291)

The notion of a 'bad lad' or 'bastard' is bound up with the performance of dominant masculinity and is viewed as being attractive to some women, which the research by Laviorie et al (2002) supports. It is argued that young women already 'at risk' may be attracted to boys with similar attitudes, further increasing their risk, as Capaldi et al (2001) and Laviorie et al (2002) highlight; boys with risk taking anti-social behaviour are more likely to perpetrate DVA. Whilst this may be evidenced it is important to make clear that young women do not choose abuse. As the quote above by Chung (2007) emphasises and my

data supports, young women are attracted to men whom they perceive can look after and take care of them; their knight in shining armour. Dominant forms of masculinity are equated with keeping women safe, a protector; however, from my data this appears to be a distortion. Katie talks about her partner and uses the phrase, 'bit of a bad boy' about her partner; I tried to develop this further:

Sarah: so, you said you kind of knew that he was a bit of a bad boy?

Katie: yeah, I heard stories. All his exes were like 'he did this to me, put me in hospital'; but he was still sleeping with them all. So, I thought they were just saying it to try and break us up, so the first six months were amazing. We got on so well we were like best friends; I lost all my friends for him because we were together all the time and then he turned out to be exactly what they all said. But they were all still sleeping with him!

Sarah: Were his ex's telling you what he was like at the beginning of the relationship?

Katie: straightaway. He went out with his stepsister and then they broke up. She told me then 'he's like this; he's like that, you don't want him'. I just thought she's jealous because they had broken up weeks ago and she wants him back and then another ex said on Facebook, within a month of us being together.

Sarah: did you consider that he might be capable of what they were saying?

Katie: yeah, but he didn't hide anything. He would read out their messages and how they wanted him back saying things like 'I love you babes', so if he was treating them like that, why would they still have him around them?

Sarah: so it was difficult for you to work out the situation?

Katie: yeah.

The label of 'bad boy' Katie describes as coming from others, especially his ex-partners, therefore Katie did not take this to mean that it represented any truth, but rather as part of a jealous reaction. Katie also identifies that many of the same young women were still sleeping with him and believed that they would not do so if he were an abuser as they had said. As *'the first six months were amazing...we were like best friends'* Katie rejected any warnings from others and any warning signs were constructed as love, underpinned by the 'honeymoon' phase. The 'romantic' attachment to him grew and she became increasingly isolated from friends and family; as discussed this is a technique used by perpetrators of abuse to maintain control. Katie's confusion is evident as she asks *'why would they still have him around them?'* There were so many

contradictory factors to the situation than even when Katie fully experiences his violence and abuse and realises that *'he turned out to be exactly what they all said'*; clarity is still absent as she ends the sentence *'But they were all still sleeping with him!'* It is telling that Katie's idea of a good relationship did not extend to believing her partner should not still be sleeping with several his exes. This illustrates the extremely complex intersection of feelings and understandings of what a 'good' relationship meant for Katie, and for all the young women interviewed. Here again, education could offer a space to both inform and challenge, so that healthy relationships and the warning signs of abuse must be taken seriously, constructions of 'good' or 'healthy' need a space to challenge the overriding conception and of love, enabling new discourses to be made. Below Grace describes the performance of dominant masculinity through her understanding of violence and abuse:

Grace: I think they think it's manly sometimes, it makes them feel good to be in control and that makes them feel big and hard, because you do everything that he says. I don't know but I think they do it maybe because they can.

This reveals the link between masculinity and control; violence is performed as part of the masculine enactment that maintains male power and control. The concept of 'big' and 'hard' are words that again conjure up an image that is central to cultural constructions of masculinity; enabling men's ability to dominate and control 'because they can'. The following extract from Jessica's story highlights the intersection of masculinity and age gaps; as she identifies her ex-partner's targeting of young women's vulnerability. The predatory behaviour of 'going' for younger girls is chilling given what kind of abuses this 32-year-old man has perpetrated. Jessica states clearly 'that's kinda wrong and really twisted':

Jessica: He always seems to talk to girls who are younger, younger than him, so he will go for girls who are like under 18, and I said, "I know you are doing that because they are young and more vulnerable". That's kinda wrong and really twisted. "You are talking to girls who look up to you and think you are great" and he often has their parents at his door, which is often my door!

Sarah: yes, you must be hurting?

Jessica: yes, and you want them to hurt as much as you. He bought me new shoes, and then he said, "I bought you new shoes ", I said "I bought

you new shoes before, and that does not entitle you.” It isn’t a gift then. It is a bribe. He said he would take them away.

Sarah: So, they were a gift?

Jessica: I thought ‘okay if you are going to be like that I could turn around and say you owe me two to three grand. I put a roof over your head. I have never not given you a birthday or Christmas present. You have NEVER given me anything. You are not entitled; I am entitled for the crap. He said: ‘keep them’ and I said, ‘I will’.

In analysing Jessica’s statement: *‘That’s kinda wrong and really twisted’*, the ‘kinda wrong’ arguably softens the ‘really twisted’, leaving it as unclear, working hard to challenge, but not totally succeeding. She is clearly hurt and angry describing the pair of shoes as symbolic of the relationship, and how she is grappling with the meaning of giving and taking in a relationship juxtaposed with the concept of entitlement. She clearly feels that he has taken far more than he has given and that she is in deficit because he has taken from her through the performance of male entitlement. Despite the clear picture of her ex-partner as a perpetrator; his behaviour and her losses, the following excerpt exhibits the contradictions that are characteristic throughout the data:

Jessica: He has just been told that he has to do a perpetrators course, which I think would be good for him. He says ‘I am how I am...I am not going to change my views’. He said he can’t change if someone is winding him up. But I have said he can choose how he reacts to something. I have said he doesn’t just have to hit someone he can just walk away. I am hoping, even if we didn’t ever end up together, that he could take that in to a future relationship and learn from it. I think he is too ignorant to do it though...he doesn’t want to change; you have to want to change.

Jessica still clearly has hopes for the relationship and wants to end up in a relationship with this man who she ‘loves’ but is, as she has stated, is: “nasty and not a very nice person” who has little intention of doing a perpetrator programme, changing his views, beliefs or behaviours: the bottom line is, he doesn’t want to and he doesn’t have to. Jessica’s story also highlights an inherent contradiction and confusion around perpetrator behaviour:

Jessica: His family have always talked about how he is, and I have seen that from his mum so that is learned behaviour and I can understand, not excuse it, but understand that he thinks that it is normal. He got into care when he was 14, I get it; it could have gone one way or the other. He chose to become the person he is, and I can’t make excuses for that he

is that person. So, no matter how much I say that to other people. He is not the nicest person, but I see the good in him.

She states: *'I can understand, not excuse it'* and *'He is not the nicest person, but I see the good in him'*. These statements are conflictual, and Jessica is struggling to make sense; resisting but not rejecting. Where Jessica states *'he thinks that it is normal'*, this really identifies a key factor in abusive relationships; where the gendered beliefs young men hold, are reinforced through socio-cultural context, and through their continued (re)enactment that normalises abusive behaviours as part of romantic relationships.

The 'bad lad' describes dominant masculinity, which is arguably attractive for its 'maleness'; an embodiment of the protector that can save the princess from adversity. The narratives support this discourse, with these young women attracted to someone who will look after them, care for them and protect them. However, this is the opposite of what dominant forms of masculinity embody through my data. The young women in my research often use language that highlights their limited experience of healthy masculinity or of 'healthy' relationships; so in their descriptions abuse is a hidden as part of the normalisation of behaviour in relationships, or as a distorted expression of care and love.

[En]trapped:

Being trapped in a relationship can describe many things, from literal to metaphorical, and is drawn from the dark romance discourse. For many women they become so broken by their experiences of violence and abuse they either have no option or can see no option. There is a widely held public discourse that it is both possible and simple for women to 'just leave abusive relationships'. This is such an insidious discourse that acts as a lid for the toxic invisible container of abusive relationships; and that fails to have any remote understanding of the complex nature of DVA, and subsequently flounders in providing the language to articulate the experience. Equally this understanding serves to objectify victims and survivors of DVA by women who have not had these experiences, forming a binary that distances and 'others' survivors. This is in serious need of an alternative; the focus is on the victim/ survivor to leave her home, friends and family, rather than the perpetrator leaving. Katie clearly

explains the factors for her 'being stuck' in her relationship, and she starts with some advice:

Katie: Leave sooner rather than later, or you will get stuck. I got stuck. I had to stay for two years. It's hard to leave, or you leave and go back. But you have that strength in you, to leave and not go back.

Sarah: What makes you get stuck do you think?

Katie: It's not a happiness or nothing like that, it's routine, being with someone for so long, you don't want to be lonely, he's made you feel that low and bad about yourself, saying that no one else will ever want you.

Sarah: So, are you saying it all becomes normal life and you just get on with it?

Katie: Yes, I tried so hard to change him, to make him good, so his parents would think that he's not that bad, so they would say 'he's got a good one there, she's changed him'. But I know now you're never going to be able to change someone. Give it a go and I failed, just like all the rest. You can't help someone who don't want to help themselves, he never wanted to help himself, he never wanted to go on any of those courses.... everyone is chasing that perfect life, that happy lifestyle. There's nothing about the bad stuff. Loads of people are trapped in bad relationships and no one knows, they look in and think they have good relationships. Behind closed doors no one knows it, cos no one speaks up about it.

Katie highlights how much strength it takes to leave a relationship, that it is possible to have agency even when you have been beaten in to submission: 'he's made you feel that low and bad about yourself, saying that no one else will ever want you'. So, 'It's not a happiness or nothing like that... its routine, being with someone for so long, you don't want to be lonely. This insightful narrative unmistakably identifies key themes that are the same for young women as the evidence suggests they are for older women. Katie positions herself as the rescuer of his 'fragile self' and takes responsibility for him and the relationship; 'give it a go and I failed, just like all the rest'. Whilst acknowledging that he was 'not good': 'I tried so hard to change him to make him good'. She ends the conversation astutely identifying that 'everyone is chasing that perfect life'; the fairy-tale happily ever after. However, a key factor of many relationships is the reality that 'Behind closed doors no one knows it, cos no one speaks up about it'. Identifying the isolation and silence associated with the experience of DVA.

Sam clearly identifies reasons for staying. Wanting a family being her primary reason in her relationship, which she did not at the time class as abusive, through disassociation she positioned him as, 'not the real him', due to his drug dependence. Sam articulates that it's understandable if you stay for the reasons she did, but not for others:

Sam: It's difficult to find someone now and think you're not going to abuse me and treat me badly. I wish there was a scanner or something!

Sarah: If only!

Sam: It's a difficult thing; obviously most abusers are not going to show that side of them until you are in the relationship and are hooked. By that time, it is too late. I don't know when you are younger, you don't stay in a relationship that long, not like when you are older and it's like 20 years together. Obviously, it's more than physical violence, much more. My personal reason that I stayed was I wanted a family. I thought that it would get better without the drugs, but if you don't have drug problems and you have family, I don't get why you would stay? I really don't get it. I think there is a maturity needed.

Sam uses a drug's metaphor to describe feeling trapped: 'obviously most abusers are not going to show that side of them until you are in the relationship and are hooked' and continuing... 'By that time, it is too late.' This highlights that once you are 'addicted' there is 'dependence' or reliance; that is arguably part of a 'loving' relationship. The complexity comes in naming and making sense of the situation when the relationship is also violent and abusive. Sam rejects the victim blaming narrative for herself and frames her reasoning for staying in her relationship as agentic, sound choice of action; she wanted a family. Sam's narrative is incongruous; she uses the argument of disassociation in terms of her ex's drug use, but then when this is no longer the case, this is dismissed and it never becomes about him, but is transferred by the 'happily ever after' discourse. As she states: 'I thought that it would get better without the drugs'. Arguably this individualistic discourse Sam draws on is not extended, as she 'others' women who stay and draws on the victim blaming discourse, when she states 'I don't get why you would stay? I really don't get it'. This clearly demonstrates the power of discourse to confine ones thinking and understanding of a situation, so contradictorily resisting for herself, but not able to scrap, finding a space to manoeuvre within, but not to reject. It sounds as if Sam is still romanticising about the happily ever after and that she is mature enough to achieve, but not others.

The end of: A case of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)

Ruby shares her story regarding the end of her 'relationship', when she was fifteen. However, it quickly became evident that what she was describing to me was a case of child sexual exploitation. Though, Ruby did not define it as such and could not consider it to be anything other than a relationship with a partner despite a Police investigation and other challenges to her version of the situation. At the time of the relationship CSE did not have a public profile; little was known about the mechanisms and nuances of CSE. Ruby's story demonstrates the lack of language, discourse and tools for meaning making regarding behaviours that are done in the name of 'love' when this couldn't be further from the truth. I found listening to Ruby's story particularly difficult, but I was glad that she was safely distanced from what she shared at the point of the interview.

Sarah: did that relationship end badly?

Ruby: yeah. Because the police were actually looking for him, CID were at my dad's house, because I was with him for a month and because my mum had phoned the police and said that I was missing. But I was fine, I don't know; I just wanted to be with this guy. Yeah, the police were looking for me, so I had to go to the police station and make statements and stuff and trying to keep quiet about everything. But they wanted to know everything, and they were pushing me and pushing me, then a week later, they asked me and asked me. They said that he had treated me like a prostitute and said really horrible things. I was like "he loves me" he is not treating me like that, and they said that he was trying to get me addicted to drugs so that I would sleep with other people and things like that, pretty brutal stuff, but I didn't see it like that.

Ruby did not consider herself to be 'missing' even though she had been reported as such by her family, and the police were treating her as a missing person. As far as she is concerned, she '*just wanted to be with this guy*'. When Ruby was 'found' and she had to give a statement she was '*trying to keep quiet about everything*'. The police were obviously aware of the risk posed to Ruby, but her story and her understanding are at odds with their account, and even though she states the police tried to make her understand their version of events, this conflicted with Ruby's construction of the situation as a 'romantic relationship'. Ruby constructed the situation as a loving relationship and disagreed with the police assessment of the 'relationship' as anything other and was totally horrified at the suggestion that prostitution may have been an ulterior motive for her 'partner'. She describes the police inference as '*pretty brutal stuff*'

and, although she understands what they were suggesting insists ... *'but I didn't see it like that'*. This validates the complex nature of 'love' and 'relationships' and the limited discourses available with which to make sense of such relationships, even in the face of robust challenge.

I was keen to try and explore this further whilst being aware that Ruby was trying to maintain and preserve the perception of the situation as being in a 'relationship' and that through this strategy of sense making it had helped her to cope:

Sarah: did he try and get you into drugs?

Ruby: yes, but I didn't see it like that.

Sarah: did it just seem like a normal relationship: like fun at the time?

Ruby: yeah it did. Like cocaine, they say it just gives you a buzz and like smoking weed. I think I did it because he was doing it. Before I met him, I had tried weed before, but I was never into any other drugs. When you're young you don't know what it's doing to you, if you have a drink quite a few times you know that having another one is going to make you tipsy. But when you do drugs, you don't know what it can do to. You feel okay, luckily, you don't know how to act, and so you're just yourself. You know what I mean?

Sarah: I guess I know what you mean about drinking, you know how you're going to feel when you feel drunk, is that what you mean?

Ruby: Yeah and when you go out, you might feel more so because you are out and it's exciting, but it's different with drug.

Ruby talks about drug taking and how she saw it as part of a 'normal' relationship. Because she had *'tried weed before'* she did not consider that he had tried to 'get her into drugs', relating drug use to her previous social behaviour. Ruby alludes to taking other drugs, but the conversation becomes rather cryptic *'But when you do drugs, you don't know what it can do to you. You feel okay, luckily, you don't know how to act, so you're just yourself.'* It suggests that she was unaware of the performance of her identity when taking particular drugs. She likens it to knowing how to 'act' when drinking alcohol. When she asked: *'You know what I mean?'* I tried to clarify her meaning but remained unsure. Ruby presented as very fragile and I did not want to push the boundaries of understanding around the issue of drug taking so I changed the focus and asked about the perspective of the police:

Sarah: so, the police were suggesting to you, that you had been taken against your will?

Ruby: yeah pretty much. Although, I didn't see how, or why, they were hassling me. I did go to the shops with him and make payments and things. I think I was, I don't know, I had to look older, I think that's why I liked it, I wanted to look nice and have high heels and have someone look after me, my mum wasn't, and my dad wasn't really up for things like that. So, I don't know, if you're a girl with that background it would be something you want to do, I can understand that.

Sarah: what do you mean about that background?

Ruby: That kind of family and friends.

Sarah: ah OK, so you said you were kicked out of school, did you still see school friends, did you have anyone you could talk to?

Ruby: yeah, not really, I think two of my friends knew about it. One of my friends knew from the start that there was something not right about it, but my friend J she, I think she had sex before me, so this wasn't anything new.

Sarah: but did they say anything to you like it might not be a good thing to do?

Ruby: what my friends? Yeah K did, but I thought she liked him, and she wants to get off with him (laughs).

Ruby did not see it as a case of being 'abducted' as this did not fit with her view of the situation; To Ruby, looking older, looking nice and having someone to look after her created a fairy tale where she locates herself as the princess in high heels and is being looked after by her knight in shining armour. Ruby alludes to her background and potential risk factors that would have a bearing on the situation, and her vulnerability, but her sense making is arguably obscured by the more powerful fairy tale and happily ever after discourse. This means she is unable to understand and assimilate the reaction from the police. Although she admits to being part of some illegal behaviour: '*I did go to the shops with him and make payments and things*'. This is very much placed as a separate issue that has no bearing on the situation. In relation to her friends this validates the understanding that young people will seek help from their peers and how this is crucial in maintaining or rupturing the discourses that support young people in their sense making of complex situations; such as this example of CSE. So, of the two friends that Ruby discloses to one had an awareness of the potential dangers of the situation '*One of my friends knew from the start that there was something not right about it...* however, this is dismissed as Ruby

interprets this concern as potential jealousy: *'but I thought she liked him and she wants to get off with him!'* Ruby laughs at this point in a way that almost mocks her own words. The second friend did not seem to have any concern over the situation which Ruby puts down to it not being an unknown situation for her: *'I think she had sex before me, so this wasn't anything new.'* This again makes evident the discourse of relationships for young women that constructs even a probable 'kidnap' as part of a 'normal' relationship! I was interested in how Ruby viewed the end of the 'relationship'.

Sarah: So, did you ever see him again?

Ruby: I was literally with him for a month every day, and then he dropped me off at my dad's, because the police had been to my dad's and to his friends. Because what he was doing was so dodgy, he had to get rid of me.

Sarah: what did he say to you when he dropped you there?

Ruby: he was upset. He was saying he can't do it anymore. Then I went into care. Everything was just horrible. I was so upset; I managed to get hold of him by saying that my dad was calling me. I managed to again but then I think that was it after that....

Sarah: so, you got in contact with him the last time, and that was it?

Ruby: yeah I think when I was in the foster care where the police put me, I would speak to him on the phone, and then I think, yeah that was it I think, I would bump into his friends and they would say they would give me so much money if I changed my statement and stuff. We fell out, because I started to believe what the police were saying about him. I had so many authorities pushing on to me that I felt like maybe this is wrong, and I don't want it to happen to another girl, and all this stuff; it was massive.

So, after spending every day for a month with her 'partner' once the police were involved Ruby said, *'he had to get rid of me'*, stated in a very casual way. Although she says this was *'because what he was doing was so dodgy'*, I think this is said in reference to the fraud he has committed rather than in any sense relating to any aspect of their 'relationship'. It is identified in such a way that defines 'dodgy' as something other. However, cracks begin appearing in the delineation of what constitutes 'dodgy', and an alternative meaning of the relationship is being considered by Ruby. She states that once the authorities questioned her understanding of the relationship, she started to consider an alternative version of the situation. It is only through the transcription that I realised that I had not pursued the idea that she didn't want it to happen to

another girl; when what she had presented was a construct of a 'normal relationship' and therefore this statement is contradictory, as soon as there is any suggestion of rejection of the romance discourse it is then discursively reconceptualised and accepted. It is difficult to know where this situation would have ended as it sounds as though she was being groomed for further exploitation. So, although she initially focuses on the fraud she moves on to the aspect of kidnap and sex with a minor. But, further into the interview she moves back to a position where she blames herself for the 'relationship' aspect. I found this very difficult to hear and personally, on an ethical basis I was compelled to respond:

Sarah: Do you know what happened to him?

Ruby: yeah...done for fraud. They were asking if we had sex because obviously, I was under the age of 16, but I said I consented to it, it wasn't that, it was more of him using cards in people's names and taking people's money. We ended up not speaking, because it's my fault that he got in trouble.

Sarah: it was not your fault; he was the one choosing to do those things, and you were under 16. It sounds like the police already had enough evidence.

Ruby: it didn't help that my mum reported me missing.

Sarah: but what if they were right?

Ruby: the police?

Sarah: yes, you were young, you said yourself that you were vulnerable.

Ruby: I don't know, I think he was all right, I think it was the person he was working for.

Sarah: either way, imagine the consequences if she hadn't told the police.

Ruby: Yeah, I guess, I just thought she was ruining it for me.

Sarah: I guess it must have felt like that at the time; but in hindsight?

Ruby: it felt weird to me, because it felt like she is not like normally concerned but then she is suddenly there when I don't need her. You know what I mean?

Sarah: yes, I understand what you're saying and how it must've felt. But hopefully in hindsight you may have a different perspective of it?

Ruby: yeah, yeah, I guess so now.

Even at the end of this part of the conversation Ruby found it hard to envisage that this was anything other than a romantic relationship resignedly stating 'yeah, yeah; *I guess so now*' when asked about her current perspective on the situation. Throughout she felt that people had ruined her experience of a happy loving relationship adding to the feeling that she was abandoned and unloved by family. When her parents intervened, Ruby did not understand this unusual concern and felt they were interfering unnecessarily. It is with relief that this story was concluded with Ruby being safe. However, it was just a small part of her story which demonstrated a continuous pattern and normalisation of abuse.

Through analysing the young women's narratives one can see the complex negotiation of the confining discourses of romantic love and the limitations of the lack of alternatives with which to make sense of such incoherent experiences. The gendered lens of romantic relationships is visible in the narrative of 'male entitlement'; an indisputable right to something, which can be requested, but if refused just taken by virtue of gender. This hierarchical positioning of masculinity is embodied by dominant forms of masculinity and becomes a signifier that women are attracted to. However, my research data suggests that young women perceive dominant forms of masculinity to be equated with love, care and protection, a 'prince' to save her from adversity or 'knight in shining armour' to protect her from life's perils. This is a gross distortion. So, although evidence suggests that the notion of the 'bad lad' is attractive Laviorie et al (2002), it is the gendered performance of masculinity as perceived rescuer and saviour that is attractive, not abuser. Love is thought to conquer all, so even the bad lad is thought to be tamed by love. Throughout the narratives masculinity is performed through aggression towards these young women and appeared to underpin rigid beliefs about femininities and the prescribed roles within a romantic relationship, the violence and abuse then reinforced the gender boundary thereby maintaining a particular system of gendered patterns and performances.

Some of the young women talked about being trapped in their relationships when they had started to wrestle with the incongruity of their experience, or when the realisation that the responsibility to 'fix' his fragile self was untenable, and they had 'failed' *'just like all the rest'* (Katie). Many of the young women made comment on what kind of person their partner or ex-partner was; 'not very

nice; 'not good' mean'; thus, identifying unpleasantness or cruelty and rejecting the person, but still stating they loved them and the relationship. This maintains the dark romance narrative and acceptance of the bad lad they 'failed to fix' or make 'good'. Through these discursive accounts, isolation and loneliness were evident however, they were also rejected by drawing on the dark romance narrative that tolerates the abuse for the promise of the 'happily ever after'. The process of disassociation was also evident, however, in Sam's case she was arguably agentic in meeting her need of having a 'family' regardless of his abuse, however at the same time she reinforced the victim blaming discourse as she 'others' other young women who stay in abusive relationships. Arguably through the disintegration of the self and experiencing the chaos of abuse, there is a need to reassert one's identity and the narratives suggests that this shoring up of one's gendered identity is through the heteronormative performance of romantic relationships, being trapped in a double bind.

The data also demonstrates the young women's challenges at resisting and rejecting the fairy tale and the dark romance discourse. However, there are examples of young women's agency, in escaping the violent and abusive relationships they were then able to negotiate the meanings and understandings of their experience and to partially articulate this reality. Although for some this was in stark contrast, even when there was very strong evidence to rupture the fairy tale and dark romance, this was not taken up when their gendered identity was so invested in that construction of their self. So, attempts to resist or reject these dominant discourses were inconsistent and contradictory. It is hard to counter the gendered scripts of romantic love, the fairy tale or the dark romance especially in light of the disintegration of one's identity, and the lack of any alternative. Through narrating their experiences and understandings of their relationships in the context of violence and abuse, the young women present incoherent, contradictory stories that demonstrate both agency and powerlessness. It is clear to see how love can become so distorted.

Chapter Eight: Young women's stories of pregnancy and motherhood

In this chapter I further thematically explore young women's relationship practices and understandings with a focus on their experience of pregnancy and motherhood. As I have highlighted, this was a major theme to emerge out of the data, and for this small sample of young women played an overwhelming part in their experiences of DVA. Through their narratives I explore the role of the state in enforcing and (re)enforcing the discourse of 'victim/ mother blaming' through a 'failure to protect' and how the young women experienced and negotiated these confining and limiting constructions. I examine and (re)frame the young women's agency through these experiences and their ability to thwart these limitations, with the potential for rupturing ways of understanding and performing as mothers in DVA contexts. Through the stories it appears that young women have, as the research suggests (Volpe et al: 2013) low power in relation to their reproductive rights in abusive relationships and it was common place for the young women in my research to lose or be made to lose their babies.

Experiences of miscarriage and pregnancy:

When I met Sadie, she was heavily pregnant, and she stated from the beginning that the baby was not her ex-partners. She describes here her experience of losing her ex partner's baby through miscarriage whilst at school, her current pregnancy, and her ex partner's reactions to the pregnancies:

Sadie: I did get pregnant with him, but I lost it, but I was happy with that, not in a mean way.

Sarah: did he know?

Sadie: yeah, I didn't tell him at first, cos I didn't want to break up and I was in school.

Sadie describes her emotions around the loss of her pregnancy 'I lost it but I was happy with that', she clarifies this statement with 'not in a mean way'. Sadie is conveying that she is both sad for the loss of her baby, but also relieved that the pregnancy did not continue. This illustrates how she ultimately felt about her pregnancy and describes how she initially used the situation to resume the

relationship. The following extract demonstrates an agentic dialogue she has between her current and former selves that questions her own actions:

Sadie: I thought I just got to talk to him. And I did, and he was like 'why should I get back with you? I told him everything I could, everything I could think of to get him back and I was like 'I lost your baby', I said 'I was pregnant with your baby'. Looking back why would I do that? I've just got myself into the whole thing again, why? And he said 'no you didn't' and I said 'yeah I did, I didn't tell you because we'd broken up and I thought you wouldn't care, and I miscarried in school' and he was like 'oh my God, I'm so sorry' It will work out and we will be so happy together we will try for another baby, and all of that crap, and I felt better all of a sudden.

Through the telling of the story of the miscarriage to her ex-partner Sadie felt that it gave him the opportunity to demonstrate that he cared about her and that he wanted them to be part of a family. She states that he responded by saying 'we will be so happy together we will try for another baby', drawing on a fairy tale and a 'happily ever after'. Sadie, with hindsight rejects that statement as 'all of that crap', even though she is aware with this lens of retrospection that it may well be a load of rubbish she identifies that 'I felt better all of a sudden.' Providing her with a promise of a 'happily ever after' made her instantly happier, signifying how her sense of self and happiness was intertwined with the relationship. Sadie then moves on to talk about her current pregnancy and the conversations with her ex-partner regarding this pregnancy.

Sarah: So, you told him the baby wasn't his?

Sadie: yes.

Sarah: did he freak out?

Sadie: he was like 'you slag, whatever, do one' he said 'never talk to me again'. He kept trying to force me to get rid of it, he wanted me to get rid of it, so I could be with him.

Sarah: so, is that the last time you saw him?

Sadie: yeah, just after I said to him 'I'm not getting rid of it' and he was like 'fine then fuck you, do one' and that was it and I didn't talk to him and because I'm pregnant it stopped me talking to him. Thank God. I never think about talking to him anymore. I wouldn't even think of saying 'hi' to him.

Sarah: Really?!

(At this point in the conversation I was very surprised and listening to the transcription this was evident in my voice.)

Sadie: yeah really. It's gone now; I've lost all my feelings for him. I still think about him, but I've lost all of that reason to go back to him now, I wouldn't think of going back to him. I mean I do think about how he was good-looking, but I can't do with him anymore. I'm pregnant and I'm happy and I guess this baby was a good thing I guess if I never got pregnant, I'd be with him for God knows how long.

Sarah: so, you think you would still be with him?

Sadie: yeah, the only reason I broke up with him was because I was pregnant. He wanted me to take the harassment order off and get back with him. That would have happened if I hadn't got pregnant. Thankfully I got pregnant; it saved my life, I guess.

Sadie's last sentence is incredibly powerful; both scarily and insightfully accurate, although we will never fully know. So, it was the rejection of the pregnancy and therefore of Sadie that has kept her safe from her ex-partner. Sadie's pregnancy enabled her to stay away from the relationship; however, if the baby were her ex-partners', the story may have been very different. This shows the power and control that abusive partners have over the choices relating to sex and reproduction. This also demonstrates the power that pregnancy and children can give young women to get out of the abusive relationships they are in; they may be an externalising factor that allows for a shifting of their lens that enables them to do something for their children that they were unable to do for themselves.

Pregnancy: Told to get rid...

Like Sadie's story above that frames the concept of 'get rid', Grace and Katie both shared their experience of a loss of agency around their reproduction:

Sarah: have you spoken to your mum about all of this now?

Grace: umm, not really. She saw a lot of the bruises that he gave me. And she said 'that ain't right' and I said it was play fighting but just a bit rough because he was a lot bigger than me; everyone said he was built like a... like, he was huge. She said, 'well I'll have words with him because that's too rough you mustn't play like that, he can learn to be more gentle.' I was terrified of her saying anything. I think because he was always threatening to leave if I did anything wrong that I would lose him, and I did not want to lose him that was the last thing I wanted to happen. I even got pregnant and he told me I had to get rid of it or he would leave and now when I look back it probably wasn't the right time to have a kid, but I regret it. I don't know but it was a big thing to go through, all because he said he would leave me if I didn't and he left anyway obviously. Yes, that was all at roundabout when I was 15-16.

Grace shared with her mum that the bruising she had on her face and body were from her partner, but she made excuses for their existence. Grace felt unable to disclose to her mum as she was so afraid of the relationship ending. The term “get rid” is the phrase that has come up many times within the interviews, as it did above in Sadie’s story and here for Grace. The term invokes a destructive instruction to relieve or free oneself of something undesirable or unpleasant and embodies the gendered power that men have over women’s reproduction. Arguably it is, like other aspects of DVA, to dehumanise the situation, to render the situation to the status of rubbish and to be so defined by male power and privilege. This put the responsibility and emphasis for action on to the young woman and was reinforced by threat. When Grace states: ‘I even got pregnant and he told me I had to get rid of it’ it was followed by a threat, that if this was not carried out: ‘he would leave’. In retrospect Grace feels regretful for the ‘decision’ made but draws on the narrative of age and motherhood, and the ‘correct’ timing and positioning of having children: ‘and now when I look back it probably wasn’t the right time to have a kid, but I regret it. I don’t know but it was a big thing to go through all because he said he would leave me if I didn’t and he left anyway obviously.’ Grace wistfully shares that it is such a big decision to make and a huge emotional trauma to go through whilst feeling isolated, alone and still at school. Grace’s also accepts the ‘teen mum as social problem’ narrative, and how this is further impacted by the context of DVA; however, this may act as an emotional pacifier for her ‘choice’; which she sadly regrets. Grace also highlights the power of constraining discourses with intersecting disadvantages and the (in)ability to be agentic in relation to sexual intimacy, contraception and motherhood.

Katie talks about her experience having just left school, setting up home and planning to start a family; but how this decision was made for her where she felt ‘forced’ to end a planned for pregnancy:

Katie: before, I was in another relationship for a long time and I got pregnant with him and he forced me to have an abortion. I just have to get on with my life. The relationship ended just like that, and then I went straight into a relationship with...you know.

Sarah: Can you tell me about that relationship?

Katie: yes, it was good at the start...in the end I lost my job because I was pregnant, but I didn’t lose it, I gave up my job because I got

pregnant. We planned to get pregnant we planned to have a baby. Then he went back on it and then I had his mum take me out to dinner forcing me to get rid of it. He would say 'if you get rid of the baby and then we can get married'. I spoke to my dad about it, he said 'don't do anything you don't want to do, have the baby if you want to, if you don't want to look after it we will help you out'. But then I just got rid of it, and my dad, he came with me.

Katie felt that her planned for pregnancy was then taken away from her and the offer of 'if you get rid of the baby' would then enable her to live the promised fairy-tale of 'happily ever after'; 'then we can get married'. Katie was not only pressured by her partner but also by his mother to 'get rid' of the wanted and planned for baby, however: she was able to confide in her dad who supported her, both in offering to look after the baby if she did not chose to terminate the pregnancy; and through going with her when she had made her 'choice' to terminate. The discourse that women have a 'choice' arguably obscures the 'effect and constraints of coercion' (Tankard Reist: 2000), it appears Katie had little power and freedom, rather the responsibility to decide between things she did not want, in a situation she arguably did not create.

Ruby narrates her experience of pregnancy whilst 15 and living on the streets with an abusive partner:

Ruby: Umm, well, I broke up with him he was being more abusive, he was smoking loads of weed and drug dealing; and putting us in like dangerous situations. I knew it was right to leave but I felt like all of the stuff, I was in the middle and I had to get out of it, probably the hardest way, and I didn't want him to have a police record again. The first time he hit me was when I was pregnant. The dv police came to see me. Obviously then it would be on his police records. The worst part was actually when I was showing that I was pregnant, the amount of stress he put me under was actually worse than being hit or anything, the stress that he put me under. The just not getting on, him knowing there was a baby inside me just that was the worst. At first, we were so in love. Then I was in a refuge.

Sarah: How long were you in the refuge?

Ruby: Two months, it was really nice there; I kinda wish I had stayed there, cos the women were really nice, and I wasn't too far away. It was nice after the streets, even though there were still old friends there. Then I moved to a city.

Ruby's story demonstrates the clear link between pregnancy and the onset of DVA, as she states, 'the first time he hit me was when I was pregnant', and recognises the impact this had, the relationship had quickly moved from 'love' to

needing a place of refuge. However, she was still drawing on the gendered discourse of being responsible for the relationship and although she 'knew it was right to leave' she did not want him to be in trouble with the police due to his police record. Ruby was able to access a place in a refuge, but subsequently returned to her partner, and with hindsight states: 'I kinda wish I had stayed there' (the refuge). In concluding the taping of the interview, when the recorder was turned off Ruby shared that she had lost her child through the court process due to a 'failure to protect' and was happy for me to write about it but she did not want to talk about it on the recorder. Ruby was angry, as she felt that she did not have the protection from anyone when she was a child, but 'they' (social services) then step in and take her child. This 'double loss' impacted Ruby's ability to exert power over her own life and she positions herself and is positioned as responsible for the perpetration of abuses against her throughout her experiences.

During the recorded interview I asked Ruby what she thought about having a baby in her situation:

*Ruby: I thought being pregnant would sort of like complete me and everything because I always wanted my own family and I felt like I could give my child everything back then. I could give it love that I didn't get from my mum and dad, and plus I thought already I'm with someone I love and plus there were other girls who had babies at 16 so it feels like it's not so wrong, but I could understand like I wouldn't have another baby for a long time partly because of everything I went through the trauma and stuff. I am more sensible now. When I was 15, I remember lying to ****I was pregnant so I think I was doing it to please him as well and then he would say he only had six months to live and stuff like that. But you do have this fairy-tale in your head that you know if you have a baby then everything is gonna be okay. But actually, it makes everything more difficult.*

Sarah: so, are you saying having a baby will make you more complete?

Ruby: yeah you think. But really there is so much that goes within, emotions...and stuff...

Ruby describes the need for 'family' and the need for love, although questionably she describes it as 'giving' love, I would argue that this could be interpreted as a need for love and to affirm her identity through being a mother. This rationale is built upon by 'I thought already I'm with someone I love'. Although what it actually means to be: 'with someone' that 'I love' is uneven terrain in a young violent and abusive relationship. Ruby draws on the dominant

discourse that equates 'teen mother' with 'bad mother' but provides justification for challenging this framing of young motherhood summing up her case by stating 'plus there were other girls who had babies at 16 so it feels like it's not so wrong'. Arguably a reading of 'not so wrong' renders it intrinsically wrong to Ruby underpinned by the following statement of 'I am more sensible now' to reinforce the fact that it is not so wrong...if you are sensible. Ruby draws on the romantic love discourses that position having a baby as part of the 'happily ever after'... "But you do have this fairy-tale in your head that you know if you have a baby then everything is gonna be okay". As I have discussed at length these discourses are so powerful, they frame and map our gendered lives and for young women the promise of the fairy tale life is so alluring, more so arguably, after their childhood experiences. A chance to right the wrongs perpetrated against them, a discourse that place the power and responsibility to obtain the trajectory into Disney land on to them. Drawing on her own experience of pregnancy, motherhood and a young relationship in the context of DVA Ruby encapsulates the inherent complexities by stating 'But actually it makes everything more difficult'. Arguably this is an understatement of the extreme pressure and hardship inherent in mothering in a DVA context.

In the excerpt below Jessica describes the experience of being pregnant, although there is a substantial time of consideration before she answers my question and she appears guarded in her response:

Sarah: Was he violent towards you when you were pregnant?

Jessica: (Long pause) Ummm. Not as such, not physically, but mentally, he would be like "you're boring" and I would be like "what do you expect me to do, go out partying". He went to jail when I was pregnant and he wrote to me every day and he was like "I am going to step up", I'm going to be this wonderful person. But he didn't do anything. He got me kicked out of the bedsit I lived in, and then I had to go and live with a horrible person, who had a drugs problem and he pushed me down the stairs (laughs)...

Sarah: So, quite a scary place to be when you're pregnant?

Jessica: Yeah, it was someone who he knew that owed a drug debt...like I said; if it isn't paid off, they are going to do something about it.

Jessica: now I get really upset MY DAUGHTER SHOULDN'T SEE ME UPSET.

For a part of Jessica's pregnancy her partner was in prison and was promising to 'step up'; Jessica implied that this meant that he understood his behaviour to be unacceptable and that he would change. However, in the telling she was sarcastic, and she suggests that any promises made were empty ones. Through the unfolding of Jessica's story, it became very clear that any concept of 'stepping up' did not occur. It was also a choice he had; a luxury not afforded to mothers. Whilst it is not clear as to what point 'He got me kicked out of the bedsit I lived in,' or what occurred with her having to live with a 'horrible person, who had a drugs problem and he pushed me down the stairs', the result was that she was visibly angry by recalling the situation. Jessica went from laughing to shouting, 'MY DAUGHTER SHOULDN'T SEE ME UPSET'; drawing on what it means to be a 'good mother'.

Fathers and domestic violence and abuse:

The young women in my research talked about their (ex)partners in their roles as fathers. This reiterated the themes identified in the literature and analysed throughout the data, very much one of contradiction; the position of fathers in domestic violence contexts in relation to their children is paradoxical. It has been identified that the impact of domestic violence and abuse on children has been on the policy agenda for some time, however there is now further impetus to recognise and understand how children are positioned in this context. Previously they have been situated as 'witnesses' to domestic violence, however a revision of this understanding positions children in a DVA context as 'experiencing' an adverse childhood experience; they are not passive 'witnesses'. This shift in refocusing allows for a reconfiguration of the position of fathers in this context, currently men who are fathers, who are violent, are contradictorily constructed within dominant discourses. Featherstone and Peckover (2007) identify that violent men are constructed as 'perpetrators or offenders' which then renders them invisible as fathers. Men are also more likely to be positioned as a 'bad husband' but 'good father' or their fathering is 'good enough' and therefore they are not subjected to the high level of scrutiny that women experience as mothers (Wendt & Zanettino 2015).

The dominant pervasive and enduring discourse that children need involvement with their fathers is one drawn upon by policy and practice. Men, no matter how violent or abusive claim their entitlement to their children, without taking

responsibility for their behaviour toward them. For mothers this is also a discourse they are confined to, often mandated to facilitate a relationship between child and father despite very real fears of safety. This leads to an incongruous position where women need to traverse the bumpy ground of protecting their child and the need of the child to have a father (Eriksson & Hester, 2001). This every day practise colludes and reinforces enduring and damaging discourses, as Featherstone & Peckover, state 'guidance to service providers in health and social care...emphasize the importance of 'involving fathers' (2007: 189). However; current practices that have conspired with these discourses are starting to turn their focus towards children 'experiencing' domestic violence, and the child's needs over those of the father, albeit painfully slowly, it is hope this is a forward trajectory. This would allow for a rearticulating of the roles and responsibilities of fatherhood in DVA perspectives. Men need to be held accountable and directly engaged with (Scourfield & Welsh, 2003) in order to better support all of those involved.

However, the policy discourse of violent men as offenders is also problematic as it blurs and distorts understandings of and responses to violent men's involvement in the everyday lives of their children. As I have argued and provided evidence for, leaving a violent relationship does not necessarily provide safety, rather, quite the opposite. Below Jessica shares a discussion of being a father with her ex-partner:

Jessica: His thing is more that he wouldn't want someone else to raise his daughter. I said: "if you were a good dad you would still be raising your daughter from a distance you don't have to live with her."

Later Jessica says...

I have always said to him "you will always be my daughter's dad, but let's move on" ... I don't really want anyone else, I want to find myself. Like I want to start doing a college course to be a personal trainer, so I need to spend lots of time being healthy and proactive. So, if I start now, I'm not interested in going out and getting a boyfriend or my daughter having a dad. If I was with someone who was a good role model for my daughter, it still wouldn't make them her dad. It would be good for her to have a positive male role model. But he won't have it he said, "nobody is being around my daughter, nobody is raising my daughter". I said "you have to let this go. You can't control your daughter's life; she will grow up hating you. She will say 'my dad has controlled us.'" ... She will grow up thinking that I am pathetic. She will say "Why have you let him do that for ever?"

Jessica powerfully creates a version of the future for her and her daughter in which she wants 'to find myself'; and shares a way of creating her identity free from abuse. She describes a positive trajectory that involves education and a career, one without a man, unless as a 'positive role model', signifying her ex partners inability to provide one. Yet the agency she employs is dismissed as she states, 'But he won't have it'. She clearly understands that he is controlling her and her child's life and the impact and consequences of that as she pleaded with him: 'You can't control your daughter's life; she will grow up hating you. She will say 'my dad has controlled us'. Tragically Jessica was drawing on her own experience of growing up with a mother in an abusive relationship and her feelings of blame and pity toward her mother that she had shared earlier in our conversations stating 'She will grow up thinking that I am pathetic' is possibly a mirroring of her own feelings. Again, when she narrates 'She will say "Why have you let him do that for ever?"' this arguably highlights the blame that she feels towards her mother and that she feels toward herself. This is a very difficult discourse to negotiate; blame is so entrenched in gendered constructions of DVA and compounded by motherhood.

Jessica was trying to resist the pressure of her daughters' father, where on the one hand he did not and would not 'step up' to be a responsible parent by not using violence against her; and on the other, would not accept that someone else could or would raise his daughter. This positions him with the entitlement of being a father without the responsibility for his abusive actions. Jessica framed it in the terms of 'let's move on' however, the power to decide was not hers, and the example below demonstrates that even if he has been told by social care that he is not allowed to see his child; he will be the one to decide...

Jessica: Even at Christmas, I said it wasn't necessary, social services said he can't see us. But he said, "I am not going to not see my daughter at Christmas" ... but what I'm saying is "they say no; so I will not see you, I will spend it with my family" ... He was like "no, I will come to the house". I said 'you are openly saying that you would ruin your daughters Christmas? Because you're not allowed to see her? That's wrong and that's really selfish. He said, "well my daughter should be with her dad at Christmas". And I said, "you are not acting like her dad, you are just being a scary man".

The above conversation shared by Jessica indicates how difficult it is for a mother charged with the responsibility to keep their child or children safe in the

face of resistance from an ex-partner. Even when he has been deemed unfit to see his child, it is left to the mother to negotiate the practicalities of that decision. So, in laying out clearly what that means and the impact on the child, it has no consequence for the father who decides that his rights as a father are to be maintained with no care for the opprobrium this may engender. It appears that the performance of being a 'father' rests on entitlement rather than on acts and deeds as demonstrated by the statement "well my daughter should be with her dad at Christmas". Jessica is eloquent in her riposte "you are not acting like her dad; you are just being a scary man." She continues:

Jessica: so, I said "the police would be called. All that will result in that is that social services would be involved, you won't be allowed to your daughter and she would be taken from me. She would be taken from me and she is my whole life".

Sarah; It sounds really difficult for you...

Jessica: yeah, he has done that before. He would say "if I can't see her, you can't see her either.

The power of these words cannot be underestimated. A child can become a weapon with which to hurt a woman and ultimately, they know that the loss of a child will inflict maximum damage. This is a very real threat that is a challenge to a woman's agency in negotiating the implications of these words and the driving desire to keep her child or children safe. It must be said that for the most part this is exactly what mothers do (Hester, 2011), despite additional institutional challenges to their mothering. I will go on to look at the experiences of the young women in my research who shared stories with the additional challenges from 'social services'.

A failure to protect: experiences with social services:

"This powerful narrative shapes the ways in which society understands abused mothers and influences court, social work and media assessments of women's ability to care for their children and their culpability when abusive men harm their children" (Lapierre, 2008).

Two of the young women in my research, who were mothers, had their children removed from their care due to a 'failure to protect', two more were at risk. This highlights how problematic the intersecting disadvantages of 'teen mothers' with a history of adverse childhood experiences, in DVA contexts are, and how they make sense of, and negotiate their experiences. How did they manage to construct their identity as mothers drawing from available discourses, and of

having their children removed from their care? Constructions of motherhood place the whole responsibility for the care and wellbeing of children on to the mother and this informs policy and practice; it influences court and social work on women's capability to care for their children and their accountability when men harm their children (Lapierre, 2008). Mothers in this context are positioned as 'bad mothers'; and so, the mother blaming discourse places a spotlight on to the woman rather than on the source of violence and abuse. The alienation of mothers through these powerful discourses supports the process of 'turning the gaze' (Morris: 20110) toward women's failures and away from the man's responsibility of perpetration. As Wendt and Zannettino argue "mothering discourses position women with guilt and the overwhelming burden of blame for problems in relationships and families. Women experience this personally; they are inscribed with the responsibility for actions that are not theirs and over which they have no control." (2015: 46-47). My data bears this out.

Whilst it is imperative that children are protected and cared for, the lens of responsibility is gendered (Humphreys & Absler, 2011) and is focused on the mother, who is seen to have 'failed' in her 'duty' to fulfil her normative roles and "when women do not fulfil their "duty" to protect their children, they are punished" (Semaan et al, 2013: 72). The experiences that the young women shared in relation to their 'failure to protect' were completely unsolicited. However, they were a big part of the story of being a mother that they chose to share. The narratives are complex, and they are presented entirely from the young woman's perspective, so are partial and incomplete.

Katie: I had social services, from when I got pregnant because my ex has previous history for domestic violence, and he's been arrested for hitting girls.

Sarah: did you know that?

Katie: yeah. He always lived up the road from me. And then um... I got pregnant and at ten weeks I got a letter through from social services and they put me straight on to child protection before the baby was even born. I had never ever been in trouble with the police; I had never done anything wrong. I've always been like, good, always went to school and then I got into a relationship with him and it just went downhill from there. Social services got involved; I lived with my dad with my son when he was first born and like we used to go out with him all day and do what we wanted (the ex-partner).

So, for Katie, finding herself pregnant and having identified herself as 'good', when she states 'I had never done anything wrong. I've always been like good, always went to school'. It is interesting that part of the construction of being 'good' is always going to school. This also arguably constructs a victim or survivor as *being* 'bad', rather than *having* bad experiences. From the beginning of her pregnancy Katie was contacted by social services and her unborn child was on a child protection plan which Katie positions as her being 'in trouble', and links this to being in a relationship with 'him'. Arguably given his history, which Katie knew about, it was important that the baby was protected. However, through her narrative Katie feels like it is her that is in trouble. It is interesting that she knew about her boyfriend's past, but as I explored in the previous section on 'making sense of relationships' Katie had shared how she did not believe the young women that shared their story with her, as she felt that they really wanted to get back with him and that the start of their relationship was lovely. She believed that he loved her and that was it, by the time social services had confirmed his violent past she was already pregnant and hoped it would be different. However, Katie shares her experience, having just given birth:

Katie: On the day I was giving birth to our son, about an hour later, he told me that his ex was pregnant with his baby. That was the worst thing he done, an hour after I gave birth to my son. So bad!

Sarah: yes, that is so bad. How can anyone do that?

Katie: my dad was in the room when he said it. My dad said if it wasn't for the fact that I had just given birth he would have killed him. He was on the phone to her while I was giving birth.

After her son was born, despite the ex-partner's behaviour during the birth, the relationship was back on and Katie and her ex-partner were going about creating a 'family'; she says, 'when he was first born and like we used to go out with him all day and do what we wanted'. However, this was short lived:

Katie continues: Then he started to become really controlling and abusive and say if you don't ask your dad to have him tonight then I'm going to go back to my ex and sleep with her and that became a more regular thing. When we used to take him (her son) down the flat he would hit me in front of my son, scream and shout. He should never have been put in that situation; I had to ring social services and the police once to come and pick me up and tell them to take my son away from us. That's how bad he got. He tried taking my son off me, shouting down the phone

to the police, saying I had drugs on me, in the pram, come and check her pram. So, the police came and checked the pram and all my stuff. I was shitting myself that he had put drugs there. Little mind games he used to play, little things like that. He used to say, "I will stash drugs in the pram, and you step one foot out of line, and I will phone social services".

Things changed fairly rapidly, and Katie now recognises this as 'controlling and abusive'; she was being faced with physical, psychological, emotional and sexual violence and financial abuse. Katie also identifies that this is not a situation for a child to experience, as she states, 'He should never have been put in that situation'. Arguably 'that situation' is a situation in which a young woman was experiencing DVA, perpetrated by her partner and in order to protect her child Katie did what she could as a victim of DVA and asked for help. Katie shared that 'I had to ring social services and the police once to come and pick me up and tell them to take my son away from us'. It is thought-provoking that she stated 'away from 'us'', this reads as though Katie has positioned herself within the discourse of being unable to protect her son and being put in the situation of breaking the law with threats of hiding drugs in the pram. Where is the father's responsibility towards his child; why is it that Katie is held to account for the father's behaviour when she has little power to be able to resist his abuses? Many fathers will use motherhood as a weapon and will evoke fear through threats of social services for her mothering; this calcifies the popular discourse that frames women who ask for help by having their children removed from their care. How can it be that a perpetrator can use a potential life line as such a threat? However, despite the threats Katie rejected them and was agentic in calling the police and social services for support as she was trying to be a 'good mother' in extreme circumstances...

Katie continues: And then we had to go to a family group conference, and they said you either leave him now and keep your son or you agree to stay together then we are going to take this to court and they gave us 24-hour is to decide. So, we went to see our solicitor and he was like (partner) 'we have to fight it together and if we don't get him, I will get him taken off you anyway', so I had to fight with him. He was like "I love you" "we will get married one day" and all that. We went to court to fight it, but he got taken off us, but he got put in my dad's care temporarily. We went back to court and he had to do a perpetrators course, but he never did, he never did anything like that, turned out he was doing drugs. My son stayed with my dad.

Katie is then in a position of having to 'decide': however, where is her power to really choose in this situation? Katie wanted to choose a 'happy family'; but that

is not what was on offer. She has a choice between 'fight it together' and 'if we don't get him, I will get him taken off you anyway', leaving Katie unable to exercise any control, stating 'I had to fight with him'. It is fascinating to note that the ex-partner was told 'he had to do a perpetrators course, but he never did, he never did anything like that'. So, there is no accountability; no acknowledgement by the father that his behaviour is unacceptable; he can decide not to do a course, or to 'fight' for his child. Katie goes on to talk about her lack of agency and the factors that impact on the 'decision' making process:

Katie: A guy is much stronger than a woman. Like I had the choice of getting rid of my ex, people would say; 'oh you had the easiest decision, your ex or your son, it's such an easy decision', like no one understands how hard it is when you are in the relationship, when you have someone running you down and telling you that you have no one and you're going to lose your son any way. When you have someone playing mind games, when they know your fears, they are quite clever.

The decision is framed as an easy choice, when arguably it is not a choice at all; the decision was part of the abuse. Dominant discourses of mothering position women as 'good mother' if they 'put their children first'; therefore 'choosing' a violent and abusive partner over your child positions her as a 'bad mother'; to be reviled. But for the woman who feels she is isolated and alienated and will lose her child whatever her apparent 'choice'; there is arguably no decision but the one that you deem to keep your child safest. Katie again discursively constructs her partner as 'quite clever' and framing it in the plural; 'they' draws on a wider construction of masculinity, or men who are violent and abusive. This construct of 'cleverness' is dichotomised with her feelings of shame and by constructing herself as 'stupid' and therefore to blame (Enander, 2010).

Katie: then we went to court and they were just like, before it started, if we put your son in your dad's care, we will be more lenient but if not if you still want to carry on fighting, you won't get that. So, I put him in my dad's care that is what is best. At least I have a good relationship with my dad, so it works between all of us.

The final decision is arguably the one that kept both Katie and her son the safest. Katie was able to make a 'decision' out of the ultimatum, as a mother that had her child's best interests at the heart of that decision and be a 'good mother' in a bad circumstance. She says, 'so I put him in my dad's care that is what is best.' Through the process with social services she found out

information about her own history and her perceived 'capability' as a mother based on this history that she had been completely unaware of:

Katie: I found out that social services said there was a problem with my patterns of behaviour. I was sexually abused when I was little, 9, by my mum's partner, after my dad. They said that's what attracts me to bad boys like that, I wasn't forced, but I never wanted to do it. I was like really young and he took advantage of me. The social services have used that against me, saying that I would never be able to put my son first because I was sexually abused. Like it was oh always going to be like that. That I wasn't looked after by my mum and I looked after her and that I then looked for attention because she didn't give it to me.

This was heart-breaking to hear Katie's stream of consciousness and her sense of shame around someone else's construction of her as a woman and mother based on her childhood history of abuse. The (re)victimisation she felt having been abused and neglected as a child took away any agency for her to perform motherhood in any other way than as 'bad mother'. To have to defend herself from victim blaming of a sexually abused child is appalling. To state 'I wasn't forced, but I never wanted to do it'; demonstrates the internal angst between responsibility and blame, but thankfully the overriding rejection of that narrative as she states: 'I was like really young and he took advantage of me'. In stating 'they said that's what attracts me to bad boys like that'; again, apportioning blame and that it is her fault for 'choosing' a 'bad boy like that'. It also makes her position fixed rather than fluid, as Katie identifies that 'social services have used that against me, saying that I would never be able to put my son first because I was sexually abused. Like it was oh always going to be like that'. This fixed notion of Katie confines her and defines her making her history inescapable. It is constructed as her fault that she will be attention seeking: the wrong kind of attention. Whilst it must be acknowledged that through the arguments presented in the 'risk factors' section, there is a clear indication of risk between child sex abuse and DVA, however, I would argue that adverse childhood experiences should not be used to perpetuate victim blaming and state abuses. Where are the perpetrators in these accounts of abuse? Where does responsibility lie? This epitomises the gendered nature of discourses of abuse. I ask Katie:

Sarah: can you see a time when he (son) will live with you, is that something you want?

Katie: it's not part of the plan. He lives with my dad and he's settled. He can come and stay with me at weekends and holidays when I sort myself out a bit. I need to prove to social services that I am not getting back with my ex.

Sarah: would anything make you get back with him?

Katie: nothing, NO way. I wasn't happy; he didn't make me happy in any way. I wasn't happy with him. I think when we split up, I felt lost and lonely and the routine, when you've been together for two years, you have a routine, cooking and cleaning. I lost everything when we split up, I lost my flat, and I had to move out. I couldn't move in with my dad as it had been court-ordered that I couldn't my son. So, I was staying on sofas, I lost everything. I finally managed to find a house. All my money was in his name, it was a big jump.

Sarah: that was really brave of you.

Katie: I'm better off now, if I didn't do it then, it would only have been a matter of time to lose two more years. It was only going to keep happening, so the sooner it happened the better. I'm happier now, knowing that my son is safe as well.

Katie is adamant that there is nothing that would make her get back with her ex-partner and reflects on the fact that she was not happy in the relationship with him; that the abuse had become normalised and turned into a routine. Through the process of the relationship and the end of the relationship, Katie lost many things; her safety, her home, her child; her money; to name but a few, and she felt 'lost' and 'lonely' unable even to go to her dad's house. However, Katie's strength in the face of such adversity and drawing on the survivor discourse and 'good mother' she says positively; 'I'm happier now, knowing that my son is safe as well'.

Sam shares similar experiences:

Sam: Then it finally came to the day that I decided I had had enough, and I couldn't live like that anymore; and then social services turned around to me and said "oh, we are concerned that you are not going to cope without him." After three years of telling me I needed to get rid of him. Then after I did get rid of him, they said it was all my fault and my parenting was so bad, bearing in mind I had had them on my back for, God knows how many years, and then I finally do what they wanted me to do and get rid of him and its wrong!

Sarah: that sounds really tough...

Sam: well yeah, they originally got involved before my daughter was born; I think I was five months. They were concerned about domestic violence, but there wasn't really any domestic violence at the beginning of the relationship, it was only sort of as the years went on, he started

getting more and more violent. But in the beginning, he wasn't and when they knew it wasn't it became about his drug abuse. They tried to make out that I was so young and naïve, well yes, I was, but it didn't stop me looking after my child. There is a difference in having a relationship when they are or are not with you and whether you can look after a child or not. I felt that I was mature enough to look after a child, I was and I have been, but like I say I was strong enough to get rid of him.

Sam is very angry when she shares her story, feeling that she had been under social services' surveillance for years. Sam felt criticised rather than supported and when she finally did what they asked of her, she was told that they were concerned 'that you are not going to cope without him'. Sam suggests their original concerns were around DVA, which in her attempt to clarify states 'there wasn't really any domestic violence' posing the question of what knowledge social services had of her ex-partner and what Sam defines as 'domestic violence', as 'wasn't really' is open to interpretation, and suggests that Sam thought there may be 'some'. Although she goes on to acknowledge 'it was only sort of as the years went on he started getting more and more violent' 'More', would put forward notion there was 'some', although Sam suggests that when social services could no longer find evidence for DVA they reframed their concerns be related to his drug abuse and her age. Chronologically it is difficult to place where the DVA fits with the other concerns, however, Sam minimises her experience of abuse and feels more 'abused' by the system than her ex-partner.

Sam's narrative locates her in a conflicting situation; simultaneously acknowledging that social services concerns of her being young and naive are accurate; but that she 'felt that I was mature enough to look after a child, I was, and I have been'. Sam draws on a survivor discourse of 'strong enough to get rid of him'; therefore, not weak, able to use her power to make a decision to 'choose' her child over her abusive partner.

Sam continues: Anyway, I got sent off to a foster placement because I stupidly let my kid's dad have my daughter because he emotionally blackmailed me. But erm, I was supposed to be there for a month, but they kept me there, and they said they wanted to do assessments on my new partner to see if he was a suitable partner and to have around my daughter. They told me to get rid of him and if I didn't, they would get my daughter taken away from me. So, the one time I had a decent relationship, he wasn't physically or emotionally abusive, he had a job, he gave me money, and they ruined it. So now, I refuse to get in to a relationship. I don't want it. I know they will destroy it. I hate them.

Sam ended up at a foster placement due to concerns over her capacity to keep her child safe from her ex-partner; as she admits that through emotional blackmail, she 'stupidly' let him see his daughter. Whilst there, Sam says that she was told not to let her new partner near her daughter, or this would lead to her having her daughter 'taken away'. There appears to be a lack of communication and understanding on both sides; Sam felt it was 'a decent relationship, he wasn't physically or emotionally abusive, he had a job, he gave me money', but he was deemed 'unsuitable'. Sam is unclear behind their reasoning; it does not look as if it has been shared. The effect is Sam's rejection of relationships; however, this is blamed on social service; 'I know they will destroy it'. Sam is clear, she has no trust or faith in social care or their ability to assess risk, vehemently stating, 'I hate them'. As she moves on to the story of her experience the reason for the hatred becomes clear:

Sam: I don't understand social services, I really don't... They worry about the wrong people, like my daughter isn't being abused, she is loved, looked after and cared for, but me when I was a kid, I was pushed down the stairs, sent to bed with no food, everything. They didn't want to know. That really angers me (her anger is palpable) ... They kept telling me how depressed I was and everything, and I said how would you feel if you were living with thinking you can have your child taken away every day? My mental health probably isn't gonna be well... you know... whatever. (laughs).

Sam's anger is comprehensible, feeling very let down as a child having experienced child abuse and neglect at the hands of her step-father and mother. She suggests that social services at the time 'didn't want to know'. This is juxtaposed in relation to her daughter: 'my daughter isn't being abused, she is loved, looked after and cared for'; Sam therefore concludes from her experiences that: 'They worry about the wrong people'. Sam is locating herself within the 'good mother' discourse arguably having experienced the opposite with her mother positioned as 'bad mother'. Sam does however share that she does not blame her mother, understanding that her mother had little power living in an abusive and violent context. Sam also points out that living with the threat of having your child taken from you would negatively affect your mental health. Although it must be argued that the application of the deficit model points out Sam's short comings rather than focusing on her strengths to foster a sense of empowerment or enabling her to deal with her trauma is wretched. Sam's summation of why she might be depressed is highly insightful and

accurate. She goes on to further share her understandings of having Social services involved in her life:

Sam: The thing that strikes me as well, that I've noticed, like before I didn't realise, I thought it was only me in the whole population. But as I got older and I have opened up to more people, and meet more and more people, I can't believe the amount of young women who say "yeah, I've got social services involved in my life too". And it's always for the same reason as well, domestic violence and abuse. Even if you end the relationship, it's like they want you to change the dad (laughs). They want you to change something that cannot be changed.

Sarah: so, has it been helpful meeting other young women in a similar situation?

Sam: yes, but really sad. Why can't social services help them, rather than take away their children? Why not support them? They tear you apart.

From feeling isolated and being held to account for other people's abuses, Sam notes the volume of young people she has met that are in a similar situation to her and 'it's always for the same reason as well, domestic violence and abuse'; although there is little consolation in the shared experience. Sam notes that 'even if you end the relationship, it's like they want you to change the dad (laughs). They want you to change something that cannot be changed'. This highlights the tensions and contradictions so evident within 'the failure to protect' discourse that places the primary responsibility on to the mother; it is not possible to change the biological parentage of a child, no matter how much you might want to.

Jessica also shares her story of social service involvement:

Sarah: so, when did social services get involved?

Jessica: they got involved quite early to be fair, I was pregnant, as soon as I fell pregnant, because he was in prison twice, and he has got an abusive history. He has previous for domestic violence, domestic abuse. So, they were involved from the get-go, because he would engage and then disengage, he would move away, then move back. They were just on my back, the social workers said I could resume my relationship and that was okay and we did everything that was asked of us, relationship counselling, etc....But she started twisting things; she would come to my house and see me with my daughter and she would start to kind of... she would go back and tell him what I was saying, to cause an argument. Then when we started an argument, she could go back and report that and say we were arguing and bickering and that was around our

daughter. But I would say that was because of you, and things were twisted. It just got a bit messed up really.

Jessica's story is one of surveillance from the point she fell pregnant, based on her ex-partner's violent history of DVA. Initially they were allowed to resume their relationship based on the way they had engaged with social services and complied with the social worker's plans. It is difficult to grasp quite what the experience was for Jessica, but it sounds unsupportive and chaotic; as she acknowledges 'It just got a bit messed up really'.

The research that has been undertaken in this area such as that by Lapierre (2010) and Radford and Hester (2006) highlight that women are 'good' mothers within the often-extreme circumstances of DVA and women find ways to resist and rupture the existing confines of these obdurate discourses. As their research with mothers on domestic violence by Radford and Hester highlight:

"All the women we interviewed reported steps they had taken to protect their children and it would be inaccurate to say that they 'failed to protect'. When children were abused, women did intervene although sometimes it was impossible to prevent the child being attacked." (2006: 42).

These young mothers are I would argue, like most mothers experiencing DVA, they are doing their best in complex and extreme circumstances; putting their children first as best they can within the confines of the situation, they are in. Their identities are drawn from the notion of motherhood and for all intent and purposes are agentic in loving, supporting and providing for their children. This is compromised by a father using violence and abuse; it should not be a mother's responsibility to protect her child from abuse. It should be the responsibility of the father to not use violence and abuse! Mullender et al summarise the essence of this challenge:

"Domestic violence creates an environment deeply unconducive to achieving even 'good enough' mothering. That so many women do resolve this impossible conundrum is testimony to their spirit, endurance and determination. That many are unable to surmount the obstacles constantly and consistently should surprise no one." (2002: 157).

For young women, this is compounded by their age and additional factors that have been impacted by their own adverse childhood experiences that normalise and legitimise love and abuse. However, although at times the young women's stories accept the available dominant discourse of the 'bad mother' they also

challenge this to construct themselves as a 'good enough' mother. Assembling stories and selves where it is possible for them to move in a positive trajectory, echoing research by Langley (2017); Reynolds and Shepard, (2011), and Chung (2005).

The stories shared by the young women regarding their pregnancies and motherhood offer an insight into the confining discourses available with which to make sense of their experience and demonstrate how they are bound up in a complex interplay within the context of their experiences of domestic violence and abuse. The data highlights that young women experiencing DVA as young mothers, abused by their partners are not just passive victims but are agentic actors who demonstrate their resistance and use the power they have; both to protect themselves and their children and find ways to resist their mistreatment (Semaan et al, 2013; Radford & Hester, 2006). Drawing on the data from the previous chapter, young women experience their relationships in an embodied, intimate and romantic sense, not in a contextual 'big picture' sense, this then becomes entangled with their identity as a mother. Therefore, they are trying, not only to take responsibility for the relationship and partner, but also largely for the parenting and safety of their children; however, deprived of a lens of DVA and limiting, confining discourses around such experience's the inadequacy of language to construct and voice their experience is evident. Therefore, their stories, in the telling are complex, contradictory and inconsistent.

The responsibility and self-blame that permeates through the data enables the mothering/ victim blaming discourses, that makes mothering in this context extremely challenging. The young women in my research were very positive about their mothering role and their abilities as mothers, albeit these were being successively undermined by their partners and 'the system' arguably drawing on the same traditional discourse to construct mothers in this circumstance. There were many examples within my research that demonstrated that even though the young women were positioned as bad mothers, they all tried to resist and reject these constructions. They all found power and identity through their mothering and this allowed them to challenge and disrupt the context of powerlessness and the 'bad mother' discourse, however this discourse is so authoritative and pervasive that their attempts to challenge and disrupt are not

generally seen or understood as such. Young women do not have the power to stop the violence and abuse and they do not necessarily have any power to make a decision between their child or their partner, even if it may present that way. But young women find ways to be agentic and to be a 'good mother' within these restrictions.

The understandings shared by the young women relating to their involvement with social services identify a 'traditional deficit approach' that emphasises the young women's limitations as mothers (Hester, 2011). I have acknowledged that it is only part of the story; however, this is how the young women experienced these circumstances, so the stories are only partial and incomplete. It does provide evidence for the workings of gendered and aged discourses of mothering in DVA contexts that hold mothers accountable for the abuses perpetrated by their male partners. This gendered discourse affects women's ability to have power over choices or constructing as a 'choice' between things they would never want to choose between. Young women are agentic and protect their children in a myriad of ways that are not always understood; like much of DVA, the complex dynamics and nuances provide a place for gendered understandings to be concealed. It is acknowledged that parenting in this context is more physically and emotionally challenging, however, research demonstrates that women cope with abuse and in most cases, overcome it (Hester, 2011; Sullivan et al, 1999). The lens on parenting in a DVA context should be firmly on the parent who is responsible for using DVA; victims need support and perpetrators need to be held to account. Conversely this is not how the wider discourse or supporting narratives are framed.

Although I do not in any way claim that my research is generalizable, it does provide evidence from a group of young mothers that have not had their voices heard and that support Wendt and Zannettino (2015) persuasive argument that father blame is virtually non-existent in discussions about parenting and DVA. It also provides evidence for the (re)working of gendered discourses of mothering in DVA contexts; there is an urgent need for research in this area, to make sense of this quite senseless and enduring gendered discourse. In seeking to understand how young women make sense of their experiences we gain greater insight and appreciation of the myriad of socio-political factors that sustain the confining dominant discourses of love; the gendered nature of the

supporting narratives and the insidious invisible nature of abuse. It is through the teenage years that young people embark on their first relationships and arguably through safe contexts in which to discuss and to reimagine relationships there is a possibility to rupture the damaging discourses that were struggled with by the young women in my research. I now move on to the next chapter on education to examine the role of education in the experiences of my participants and their views on its potential.

Chapter Nine: Education

“I was in school shitting myself, I just had someone tell me that he was gonna get somebody to throw acid over me and I was 12. So, I was 15 when we got back in contact. Oh yeah, he didn’t get anyone to throw acid over me. He said ‘what school do you go to? Best watch your back’. I was walking to school and every two seconds I was thinking someone is gonna come after me and throw acid over me and I was so scared about what was gonna happen because he was gonna get me. I ended up going to a teacher and told her about the messages. But it was a teacher who didn’t like me, they didn’t care, they didn’t believe me, they thought I was being stupid.” Sadie

In this chapter I examine the role that education played in the young women’s experiences of DVA and their views on the role that it could have played in their experiences of domestic violence and abuse. By drawing on their understandings and their views I develop a case for education in both a broad and narrow sense and discuss both formal and informal education as a sphere for rupturing the confining heteronormative discourses that enable and sustain DVA.

Young women’s experiences of DVA whilst in Education:

Having examined the literature in relation to education and gender broadly, and in relation to addressing DVA specifically, a complex and contradictory picture emerges; simultaneously a ‘conducive context’ for gender violence and abuse and as a space for freedom, knowledge and a context in which to challenge and disrupt dominant gendered discourses. As I have examined throughout the thesis, DVA affects young people, as early as 13 (Barter et al 2009), this is supported by the data from my research. This positions girls and young women as experiencing DVA in the school context. All the young women in my research experienced violence and abuse whilst in their relationship when they were at school, and I have presented their voices expressing their experiences. However, the following narratives are specific to the school context. How this was experienced, negotiated and understood by these young women and in their view any role that education could have played?

Katie shares her perspective of relationships whilst at school:

Katie: There is so much pressure on young people to be in relationships at school. If you're not you're like a bit of a loner aren't you. Or you're lonely.

Sarah: so, people are pressured, do you think that they would rather be in a bad relationship than no relationship?

Katie: yeah yeah definitely. But you can't just be with anyone can you. Like at school, people fancy lots of people. So, you hear "so and so loves..." or "oh she loves ..." running between them all with lots of bitching and backstabbing. There is quite a lot going on in a relationship when you're younger.

Katie identifies clearly with the pressures of hyper femininity within the school space, and the price for resisting the pressures 'you're like a bit of a loner aren't you. Or you're lonely'. Either way the results of 'loner' or 'lonely' have a serious impact on gendered boundary maintenance, with young women accepting and performing accepted hyper femininity and keen to be in a relationship that provides or supports in the construction of accepted femininity. Rejecting could result in grave consequences for young women with few alternative discourses from which to draw their performance of femininity. Bad or unhealthy relationships are preferable, as I have examined in previous chapters, with complex (re)negotiation of performance in relationships 'with a lot going on'. The normalisation of bad relationships then develops in the milieu of unequal gender relations. The narratives shared by the young women in my research relating to their experience of violence and abuse had become so normalised that with hindsight providing an alternative lens many or 'all' of their relationships had been characterised by violence and abuse. As I go on to explore with Ruby:

Sarah: how old were you when you had your first abusive relationship?

Ruby: I don't know, I think all my relationships have been abusive. I was just 15; I had been kicked out of school. I was trying and stuff, but in the end, I got kicked out, I was bunking off and stuff. He was really controlling, and my friends would say things like he is really possessive, can't you see it?

As Ruby states 'I think all my relationships have been abusive'; placed alongside her friend's awareness: 'my friends would say things like he is really possessive, can't you see it?' arguably she discursively demonstrates her new understanding of the dynamics of abuse; that at the time were veiled as 'romantic' behaviours. Ruby's experience and sense making have been looked

at in detail in the previous chapters, highlighting the ease with which a vulnerable girl (due to known risk factors) can be coerced into a 'relationship' that is part of a wider child sexual exploitation framework. This also shines a light on the structural experience of Ruby's education, as she states '*I was trying and stuff*', indicating her understanding of what was required to be a successful young woman; however there was a lack of sympathy and support for her when she states '*but in the end I got kicked out*'. This highlights the difficulty for young women who negotiate DVA whilst in an educational setting where there is a lack of dialogue and understanding to support her with her experiences and to safeguard her within this context.

Pregnancy, DVA and the school context:

For Sadie, the experience of DVA whilst in the context of education was compounded by a pregnancy and the loss of the pregnancy, during the school day:

Sarah: How was school at the time?

Sadie: my confidence was really low so I struggled at school, I could never concentrate in school because I was always thinking about him. I was always completely horrible in school, I didn't do any work, I didn't listen in lessons it was just not what I should be doing, I just got so... it was horrible and I didn't tell anybody, I couldn't tell anybody, I didn't tell my mum, and I thought 'oh I give up'.

Sarah: so, when you were going through this and you couldn't concentrate at school, was it because you were so busy thinking about him?

Sadie: yes, it upset me, all the hard work of school, all the stress thinking 'oh my God I can't put up with that and sometimes I just wanted a break from school so I could get better so I could get over it say 'I'm fine it's all good'. But I had to go to school, and I couldn't tell anyone what was going on, nobody knew what the matter with me was, and what was happening with me. Teachers were getting on my nerves, other people didn't know, I just couldn't cope with it. I used to break down in tears. I just wanted to get out, but I had to keep it all in and act like I was having the best time of my life. I'd go home and act like everything was fine I couldn't cry to my mum, I couldn't say 'mum I am really upset. That I couldn't tell. So, in the end I used to self-harm, I did that, it was the only way I could let it out and I was the only person I could let it out on. I would let it out on myself. I would go home to my bedroom, cry, wipe all the make-up off and just act like everything was fine once I went in the other room. I was meant to be having the best of my life; but it was the worst time of my life. It was the worst thing I'd ever been through, nobody ever saw that, that's why nobody ever kind of realises what I've been

through because they never saw it, they never saw how upset I was, and they never saw what I was going through."

Sadie's stream of consciousness exemplifies the release of giving voice to her experiences, verbalising the lack of support; being unable to confide in anyone and the need to perform being 'fine' as she identifies '*I had to keep it all in and act like I was having the best time of my life*'. But far from having the best time, Sadie says that '*I just couldn't cope with it. I used to break down in tears*'. The distress that Sadie experienced was internalised and her method of release from the pain and trauma was to self-harm; '*it was the only way I could let it out and I was the only person I could let it out on*'. Sadie recognises that what she needed was a break from school; however, this 'break' was only possible whilst still attending school. At this point in Sadie's life which she describes as '*the worst time of my life*', she constructs a picture of a totally distraught young woman isolated by the complexity of the abusive situation, unable to access support from anyone. Arguably this could have been different. If there had been a safe, open space within school to articulate her experiences, which could have supported Sadie in making sense of these experiences and challenging her acceptance and normalisation of them, things may have been different:

Sarah: That sounds so very tough Sadie. What couldn't you tell anyone?

Sadie: "I was in school when I had a miscarriage, I was 6 weeks gone, and I was sat in school and I didn't have a jumper or anything and I was in the PE department. I was in so much pain, I was crying and crying, I was telling the teacher I needed to go to the doctors, she didn't like me; she said I was probably faking. I was in so much pain and I had tears running down my face. I said, 'does it look like I am faking it'? She said I just had to sit there, and then I just bled out like everywhere and I was like 'oh my God', so I got a pad off a teacher. I was pale as hell and I was shaking, and they still sent me upstairs to a class. I ran downstairs to the toilets and threw up. I said to the teacher that I had thrown up, so they sent me to the nurse and the deputy head was there and she looked at me and said, "what was it this time sticking your fingers down your throat?" I was so upset, cause I knew what had happened, so they sent me home, but she thought that I was faking it!"

The experience Sadie describes would be tough under any circumstances, but to be at school, with no one to tell, or being disbelieved; of 'faking it' and therefore totally unsupported, must have been very distressing and isolating. Sadie states '*my confidence was really low, so I struggled at school*', showing insight and understanding of her experience of education; however, this is arguably an example of neoliberalism's individualisation internalised; taking

personal responsibility, rather than putting the emphasis on school provision. This is highlighted by comments from the teacher; *“what was it this time, sticking your fingers down your throat”*. Whilst we cannot apportion any ‘blame’ to the teachers involved, it does question their understanding and expectations of young people, to behave in certain ways, in ‘acting out’. The lack of compassion described suggests that the seriousness of the situation was perhaps unknown or misunderstood. Violence and abuse in teenage relationships is ‘significantly associated with not doing well at school’ (Barter et al 2015), however the complexities of this association have not been unravelled.

Formal Education: Lessons on Relationships

As I have explored, and the data bears out, young women are experiencing violent and abusive relationships and dealing with issues around pregnancy and miscarriage within the school context. I wanted to try and understand if, or how their formal education informed or supported their experiences:

Sarah: Do you remember having any lessons about relationships?

Sadie: No. After all, when I was in school I tried to make a presentation on domestic violence as I was realising when I was at school that it was quite bad. I have my mum’s view on it too, so I thought I could make a presentation and show it to everyone, to look at what domestic violence is and what you should be doing. But I never finished it; I wanted to show everyone this is what abuses teenagers go through, you know that it happens to kids, and there’d be kids in the school going ‘yeah’ and they would know what was happening. I wanted to do that, but it never happened.

Due to her strength of feeling on the subject Sadie had wanted to participate in my research believing that so little is done in schools and society generally to understand and support young people with relationships. Throughout the sharing of her experience, which evidenced extreme levels of physical and sexual violence, as well as emotional and psychological abuse, Sadie was focused on making her voice heard so that it might make a difference to other young people. Sadie did not remember having any formal lessons on relationships but wanted to do her own presentation to alert young people to *‘look at what domestic violence is and what you should be doing.’...‘I wanted to show everyone ‘this is what abuses teenagers go through’*. Evidence suggests that the biological aspect of reproduction is likely to be covered in schools rather than any emotional facets of relationship, Sadie shares her experience:

Sarah: So, did you have any lessons on sex that talked about sex and consent?

Sadie: No, I remember in year five but not since then.

Sarah: So, nothing about sex?

Sadie: Well, biologically, that's it. But what I think they should have done is let people know loads of other stuff. Abuse, it happens a lot to teenagers; if we got to talk about it when they are younger, they wouldn't get into these relationships when they're older. If they teach sex education we may as well know about rape and everything else, I would have loved that in schools, it would have made it easier to know that it wasn't right.

Sadie's comments resonate and add substantive weight and insight to the argument that young people are desperate for education in relation to healthy relationships, when she states: *'if we got to talk about it when they are younger, they wouldn't get into these relationships when they're older'*. She further states: *'If they teach sex education we may as well know about rape and everything else, I would have loved that in schools, it would have made it easier to know that it wasn't right.'* This is imperative for young men and women to understand what is and is not 'right' when bombarded by so many contradictory messages, where sex and relationship education for young people comes primarily from online pornography (BBC, 2014).

Grace also talked about relationship education, and like Sadie, spoke about sex rather than relationships education, it is curious that they are constructed as two divergent and distinct spheres. Sex, no matter how brief or transient is predicated on relationships, and should be about relationships, they are not separate. To treat them as distinct arguably falls into a gendered binary where boys and men 'do sex' and girls 'do relationships'. Education needs to be more explicit that they are intertwined, not separate.

Grace: umm...even in sex Ed they would teach you the very basics about sex nothing about relationships, or not what's right about relationships or what's right in terms of sex. They didn't even teach you about rape. They should teach you about what's wrong about sex and if you were being forced. If I was going to teach about sex I would try and cover everything and do it properly.

Grace, like Sadie, makes a case for the need for better education, she would have liked much more information, and for it to be done right: *'I would try and cover everything, and do it properly'*.

This also resonates with Sophie:

Sophie: We did sex education, they changed things around when I did sex education, they did it in tutorials, and we did it in blocks of six, but now they do BPC, beliefs as a separate lesson. But I do not ever remember anything about relationships or domestic violence and abuse.

Sarah: In sex education did they ever talk about saying no to sex or consent to sex?

Sophie: Not openly, erm... not as a lesson, just friends.

Sophie's last comment echoes the research that shows the provision of SRE is failing young people (Pound et al, 2016); with crucial information is being learnt via peers, this is simply not good enough. Jessica on the other hand talks about her experience and is not keen on a more practical approach:

Jessica: We did lessons on like sex, and if you don't want to you say no. We had a student from a college or university, and we had to role-play with them, saying no, none of us were comfortable with doing that. We didn't even know him. We should be having classes with the boys, with people we know, people we hang out with and get on with, People we know, the familiar. People we have been at school with the last five years. We should be rehearsing with them. The teachers were like "no", they have come in to work with you. I said I can't do that, I can't do that. It was weird.

It was positive to hear the young women talk of lessons on sex and consent, although Jessica's description of an intervention around consent does not sound particularly comfortable and she makes a valid point about working with her peers rather than a stranger on a sensitive piece of work. As she sums up '*it was weird*'. This underpins the evidence that young people want good SRE delivered in a thoughtful and sensitive way, but that can '*cover everything, and do it properly*' (Grace).

Academic context:

For these young women their experiences of DVA are inevitably interwoven with the academic context of school, and the formal learning of the curriculum and GCSE's; so how did they negotiated being a 'success' in this context given the association of not doing well at school (Barter et al, 2015): Katie shares her story:

Katie: I was brilliant at school.

Sarah: So, you liked school?

Katie: Yeah, I did. I liked seeing my friends every day, I was never bullied. I was always in the right group of friends.

Sarah: Did you like school work too?

Katie: Yeah, I used to do my work, my GCSEs didn't go that well, I always wanted to leave school go on to college and do something.

Katie's draws on the neo liberal discourse that positions education as a tool for a positive life trajectory, by being 'good' and that she was always in the 'right group of friends'. Her experience shows that the school environment can act as a protective factor and can provide support at a time when it is most needed, therefore allowing young women to fulfil their potential; even whilst experiencing DVA. However, Katie's conception of 'good' did not necessarily translate into GCSE success. The young women in my research conveyed a range of experiences in relation to their perception of academic 'success', often determined by target driven notions. School can also be a safe haven for young people suffering DVA in their home with their first family and this can be internalised with some young people 'over' performing academically as a means of escape. Arguably however, 'success' can also be (re)framed when we consider the success of their negotiating their way through the complex experiences they have shared.

Sophie talks about her experience of exam success against a backdrop of DVA:

Sophie: I was in the middle of my GCSEs and it definitely affected my GCSEs, I was predicted A, and I only, well not only (laughs) got 5 A's, some B's and C's.*

Sarah: You did brilliantly, and did your boyfriend go to the same school as you?

Sophie: Yes.

Sarah: How was it going to the same school?

Sophie: Okay I guess I don't really remember. I don't ever remember being unhappy at school.

Sarah: Okay, so you liked school?

Sophie: I definitely thought school was somewhere nicer to be than at home.

Sarah: So, you said it affected your grades, is that because it was difficult to concentrate?

Sophie: Yes definitely.

Sophie had high expectation of herself and clearly had the potential to do well academically, with high predicted grades, however, she reveals her sense of disappointment in stating, *'I only'* which she quickly follows with *'well not only got'*. This clarification appeared to be through a sense of renouncement of her potential and achievements. For Sophie the school context was used as a place of sanctuary from her domestic environment, even though her abusive boyfriend was at the same school, this appeared to be preferable to her experience of DVA at home, as she states, *'I definitely thought school was somewhere nicer to be than at home'*. The combination of abusive relationships impacted on Sophie's ability to concentrate; thereby having an impact on her predicted grades.

For Grace as for Sophie, the experience of domestic violence and abuse was twofold. Grace's experience as a victim of DVA in her own relationship mirrors the concurrent one of her mother's. However, this gives us an insight into an alternative version of school and achievement to the one offered by Sophie. This is a picture of a young woman unable to concentrate, constantly calling home and then feigning sickness (*a lot of the time it just got too much for me at school and I would just go home saying I was sick*) to enable them to return home, as they are aware of their protective role for their mother. The result of her experiences of DVA left Grace *'depressed, I was very insecure. It really knocked my confidence'*; and feeling like there was no one who understood her situation or anyone who could help. *'It would be nice if school had someone who understands other stuff.'* This impacted on Grace academically:

Grace: It was the least of my worries. I just couldn't be bothered I guess I rebelled I just thought no one cares or wants to listen. In exams I just sat there I didn't do great but now if I could go back and try a lot harder and put boyfriends out of the way, I would. I just felt so alone, and I was angry at everyone for not listening or helping or understanding I just thought 'fuck it why should I try'. So, I gave up really, I couldn't concentrate I couldn't try. I couldn't study.

Grace constructs a clear picture of her academic experience against the backdrop of DVA, and succinctly sums it up in stating *'it was the least of my worries'*; She may have been unaware as to how true the statement was. Her narrative taps in to the 'bad girl' discourse whilst entwined with a clear understanding of the contextual issues and alternative discourse. *'I just couldn't be bothered I guess I rebelled'*, the 'I guess' suggests a lack of alternatives to

draw on in constructing her behaviour as rebellious and her reality as a student, and places the blame for the situation firmly on herself when she shares '*if I could go back and try a lot harder and put boyfriends out of the way*'. The victim blaming discourse is evoked, framing her 'choice' of 'relationship' and her lack of 'trying' as the root of the problem, rather than the double experience of abuse and the understandable reaction to a lack of support for trauma within the context of education and the expectant path for a young woman.

Jessica also shares her experiences of doing her GCSE's and the impact of a lack of support on her academic performance:

Jessica: when I was at school, I was doing methadone, I was skeletal, I looked awful, I looked like I was dying, and nobody picked up on it. Even my guidance teacher didn't pick up on any of it. She was meant to be the person who gave this information on drugs and she didn't pick up on any other. Wow, that says a lot.

Sarah: so, at the point of the abuse were you doing your GCSEs?

Jessica: yeah, but I went to stay with my sister for a week and she just filled me with food and put me in a better headspace.

Sarah: with everything going on, how did you do in your GCSEs in the end?

Jessica: I managed to cock it up.

Sadly, Jessica takes sole responsibility for her exam performance and describes it as '*I managed to cock it up*'. This limiting individualistic discourse positions Jessica as a failure, without looking at the broader picture of her experience, when in fact her survival from abuse and drug addiction is a success. But the discourse of educational success is about academic performance that enables a positive trajectory without recognition of their experiences.

Sam also had a difficult time academically, as she shares:

Sarah: So, how did you do at school?

Sam: Crap! Absolute crap! Hated it.

Sarah: Hated school? or life?

(Long pause)

Sam: I've never been asked that question before. If somebody had said did you hate school I would have said yes, but actually did I hate school,

or did I hate life, probably life, everything. But I never really had a good time at school. When I was younger, I would get taken off school a lot, so it was a nightmare. So, he used to take me to school, but I used to be 'I can't leave her'.

Sarah: Oh, that's very tough, so you wanted to be at home to look after your mum?

Sam: Yeah (laughs) and I got bullied for it.

As the excerpt above highlights, Sam hated both school and life, and this had an impact on her academic performance. These examples show a range of experiences and how the school context can provide a protective factor for some young women, being able to apply themselves academically and achieve 'success' or an escape from the home environment. For others, thoughts of home and what may be happening dominate and disable their ability to focus on academia, and school becomes a confining unsupportive context, where they do not feel safe. This raises the question of what is available in terms of more specific support in the context of school.

Are schools supportive in the context of DVA?

Themes of support emerged but were generally notable for their lack, and arguably services that were available, such as the school councillor were not viewed favourably. Sadie shares her view on the idea of counselling:

Sadie: I don't think counselling would have done anything, not for me, or for anyone else who did not want to talk about it. It makes you look really vulnerable and really weak. I wanted to look really strong.

Sarah: what does strong look like?

Sadie: you Wanna look like you could get out of it if it happened. You Wanna talk about it to people who are your age, who are going through the same thing I've been through, the same things as you, so you can think "look, she looks happy, she got out of it", she's not scared, she's not weak, nobody's looking down at her 'oh you're a bit weak'. You actually Wanna believe that you're not the only one who has been through it.

The idea of counselling does not appeal. Sadie's use of the term 'weak' taps in to the victim blaming discourse, positions the victim to blame for the abuse; and therefore, others as '*looking down at her*'. The juxtaposition of 'scared' and 'weak' is an interesting contradiction, to admit to being scared positions you as victim, making you appear weak. Wanting to be 'strong' may demonstrate that you are capable and responsible for the relationship, therefore constructing

herself as agentic by drawing on a discourse of individualisation. Maybe the desire to exercise agency and take back the power positions them together; the inconsistent positioning draws on masculine qualities to reject victim status and demonstrate a sense of 'doing' successful femininity. Sadie's statement that '*You actually Wanna believe that you're not the only one who has been through it*' draws attention to the isolation that so many young women feel when in a DVA context. As I have argued, it is these formative experiences without specific education, support, guidance or modelling that allow abusive relationships to flourish and become normalised; congealed within discourse.

Sophie and Jessica also talk about the experience of support from counselling whilst at school, and neither thought that the experience was helpful with Sophie going further to question the role of counselling for DVA in the school context:

Sophie: when I was at school, I had some counselling sessions at school, but they weren't very good, and I don't think I went after a while. I didn't find it very useful; I don't know you don't really want to talk to somebody at school about these kinds of things (laughs) because you see them all the time.

Sarah: can you say more about that, why do you think that is?

Sophie: I think it might be age, embarrassment; I would be happy to talk to people now, at the time you just think you don't need to talk to somebody, it might be confidence, maybe knowing stuff, I don't know.

Sarah: do you think it would have helped if you could have talked to somebody more your own age?

Sophie: possibly.

Sophie highlights the difficulty of the school context of seeing people who are known to you and how this impact on what you may or may not share, citing age as a factor. Arguably this is related to 'confidence' and embarrassment that Sophie draws on in relation to age. It may also be the lack of discursive practice around DVA that positions them as embarrassed and the experience as shameful therefore compounding their experiences of DVA. Their ideas of counselling appear to position them in a way that is at odds with what they want in relation to support. Jessica's experience also emphasises the complex nature of DVA and the role of counselling in this context:

Jessica: when I was in school, I tried to talk to her about it all and what had happened and she just kind of turned around and said, “maybe what you’re saying is that your mum and your sister resent you, because you remind them of your dad.” And I was like “hold on a minute, I never said that”. Like that was crazy, I never tried to slide that in at any point. So, I was like “I don’t want to see you again.” it didn’t help me deal with the abuse...and then my reaction was to drift even more.

The experiences of help seeking for the young women whilst at school were far from ideal. It may be that the complex nature of DVA creates a difficult space for young women, that on the one hand are positioned as ‘responsible’ for the relationship and are therefore challenged by the lack of discourse available with which to articulate their experiences. Sophie identified that it was difficult to confide in someone that you may see on a regular basis; that confidentiality and anonymity is somewhat compromised by the familiar. As Sophie states: “*you don’t really want to talk to somebody at school about these kinds of things: because you see them all the time*”. It is interesting that they do want to share their experiences but there is a remit to this role that they do not articulate.

Informal Education:

Peer Support:

‘You can’t know it’s a thing’. (Jessica)

There is evidence to suggest that young people are more likely to confide in their peers rather than adults about their experiences of DVA (Barter et al, 2009, Barter et al 2015, Allnock, 2015). These findings could be utilised in the form of ‘peer education’ for the prevention of abuse. This supports the case for prevention work being embedded in the school context so that everyone is ‘on the same’ page; challenging gendered beliefs, victim blaming, perpetrator excusing and providing an environment where misogyny and violence will not be tolerated. Given that the young women in my research had little in the way of formal education, how did this play out in their informal education?

One’s peers are part of the milieu that informs and is informed by the dominant discourses available, so dominant (mis)understandings may be reinforced rather than challenged. Ruby describes her peers in the school context whilst in her relationship:

Ruby: I went to so many schools. I think it’s really poor really. I learned a lot about history and different cultures. But I don’t remember learning much about Britain and certainly not relationships. I think you learn a lot from your friends, I think if they are normal and they have a boyfriend at

school and they still have their friends, he will probably do football and she will probably do netball or cheerleading or whatever. But if you come from a different background, things change so I don't know. I think it is about influence.

Sarah: okay, in what way?

Ruby: What your friends think and do.

Sarah: do you remember talking to your friends about relationships?

Ruby: I think we did.

Sarah: were they supportive?

Ruby: it was more like Jeremy Kyle (laughs). I think in their heads they thought it was right. If their boyfriend's drive its cos they want the car. For others it's that they want the best footballer in the school.

Sarah: Did you share things with your friends, earlier you said they saw he was controlling?

Ruby: Urm...yes, but I don't know. I think when you get to the age of 15, 16. Some girls go for the older guys, because they have the nice car and stuff, or they feel a bit more grown-up or older. Those are the girls that have sex or whatever.

Informal learning through peer culture also has the ability to reify knowledge that compounds heteronormative gendered notions. Ruby states that she did not learn about relationships through formal learning at school, but, like Katie earlier, positioned her peers in this informal role stating: '*I think you learn a lot from your friends*'. However, quite what friends have to teach is perhaps another matter when Ruby shares '*it was more like Jeremy Kyle (laughs)...*' thereby validating the limitations of one's peers. She then provides perhaps a justification for her own experience when she articulates that '*Some girls go for the older guys, because they have the nice car and stuff, or they feel a bit more grown-up or older. Those are the girls that have sex or whatever.*' This has the effect of normalising her experiences as she draws on the narrative and experiences of her friends. Ruby's account evokes the process of normalisation in young relationships; by using the phrase '*I think if they are normal*' this creates a framework around relationships at the same time. The example from Grace below corroborates the damaging restrictions of peer knowledge:

Grace: I tried talking to my friends because one of my friends was like family to him and I mentioned it to her, like what he was being like, and she literally said 'don't be stupid he is way older than us, he wouldn't sleep with us'. And that was my friend and she didn't believe me so that

shut me up and I thought one day you'll know, I'll prove it to you. But I don't know. If I can't even talk to my friends because they didn't believe me, and hadn't had anything like that, then why would teachers or other people. School was the only place really, I didn't hear nothing about it.

This is a clear example of the limitations of young people turning to their peers for support that can compound gendered performances with misinformation. Friendships and adolescent peer groups play an important role for young women who are moving away from family and into a different social space. Friendships are thought to act as protective factors against low self-esteem and depression (Baskin et al, 2010). However, this requires trust, loyalty, emotional closeness and acceptance (Maccoby, 1998) on both sides, without a strong base meanings and understandings of complex issues becoming blurry.

Sarah: so, you tried to tell a friend, but they didn't believe you? (yeah) What did you do then?

Grace: there wasn't a counsellor like at college, I went to college at 15, one day a week; College offers a lot more help. It would be nice if school had someone who understands other stuff. I mean a lot of the time it just got too much for me at school and I would just go home saying I was sick.

Sarah: so, what got too much?

Grace: just the way I was feeling and not being able to talk to anyone that understood or wanted to listen or anything. I just couldn't concentrate on school and I felt like I was just trying to sit there and concentrate but I'd rather just go home and sit in my room and cry.

Sarah: how did you feel at that time?

Grace: depressed, I was very insecure. It really knocked my confidence. I don't know if it's because I knew my mum wasn't happy, but I rang home from school probably five or six times a day just to make sure my mum was still there. I didn't want to leave home because something was gonna change while I was out, I just wanted to keep hold of anyone I wanted around; I was very panicky and worried. I couldn't really concentrate at school.

For Grace to have shared her experience and then not be believed, but rather shamed '*she literally said don't be stupid*'; left her isolated and depressed, which may have added to her sense of guilt and shame, and further silenced her.

The peer relationships described by Jessica also provides confirmation of a wider context of silence in the face of sexual harassment and assault in the school context:

Jessica: all the girls in my school were already sleeping with people. Even the younger girls were sleeping with older boys. There was one girl, who was raped, on the field, and that didn't get picked up on.

Sarah: what do you mean it didn't get picked up on?

Jessica: Well, it was hushed up, people talked about it but nothing was done.

Sarah: By teachers?

Jessica: by anyone. Its what boyfriends do, especially older ones.

Sarah: So, all your friends at school, had boyfriends?

Jessica: Yeah older guys.

Sarah: so, the pressure was on?

Jessica: yeah so like older and quite hot guys and everyone looked up to them because of the guys, they were automatically cool. I then got out of that friendship group; cos none of them had anything like that happen. When I tried to tell them about J I spoke to one friend. She said "don't get in his face and tell him what to do, if he wants to do drugs, just let him. But I was like 'what if he died?' I was only just 15; I don't want that to happen, a life on my conscience.

Sarah: how did they react to that?

Jessica: they were like yeah whatever. You're young, just have fun don't be so serious. I was in way too deep by then.

The disclosure of a rape on school premises without an appropriate response is not as shocking as it may sound when viewed in light of data from the four years preceding 2017 in which 38 out of 43 of the police forces in England and Wales reported 30000 incidents of children sexually assaulting other children, which included 2,625 alleged attacks on school premises. Again, this is an area of huge under reporting, so that it is difficult to know the true extent of the problem. The pressure for young people to be in relationships is intense, arguably part of the gendered identity performance, and this can often involve a large age gap for young women which poses a huge potential risk. So, in seeking support for abusive relationships young people's views and perceptions of what constitutes a 'healthy relationship' may be warped by their own experience and knowledge; drawn from the dominant discourse and context.

For Jessica this was complicated by drug abuse and the sense of responsibility for her abusive boyfriend stating: *'what if he died?' I was only just 15; I don't want that to happen, a life on my conscience'*. Feeling the pressure of this responsibility she was unable to take the good advice offered by her friend as she states, *'I was in way too deep by then'*. I was curious to know what might have made a difference to Jessica at his point:

Sarah: so, at that point you said you couldn't talk to your mum, friends, sister or teachers. What do you think would have helped at that point?

Jessica: I think a level of awareness, having it in schools. If you were able to go to that guidance teacher, and say "this is what's going on", because things weren't talked about or acknowledged you wouldn't have a clue as to how to talk about the things. You can't know it's a thing.

Sarah: yes, if you don't know, how can you go and talk about it?

Jessica: Exactly, I don't just think that its healthy relationships with boys that should be touched on either, its relationships with friends too. Friends peer pressure gets you into a lot of things as well, so I think it should be friends and healthy relationships too. If you let your friends peer pressure you, then you are not going to say no to a boyfriend, you are attracted to. You will be like "oh no, that's fine!"

Jessica identifies so clearly the hidden, silent nature of DVA in young relationships and the lack of awareness within the school context. I love the statement *'You can't know it's a thing'*, it is so accurate. Education, whether formal or informal is a good place to learn when a thing is a thing. There is an argument for providing safe spaces to discuss and challenge dominant discourses of relationships and abuse, misconceptions could be challenged ruptured, leading to greater awareness and knowledge of 'a thing', to then be able to access support. As Kelly point out, "in order to define something a word has to exist with which to name it." (1988: 114).

Peers and Relationship Talk:

Peer conversations about romantic relationships were experienced, however these appear to be utilised as a way of discursively constructing and maintaining prevailing notions of 'romantic relationships and the performance of 'doing girl' and 'doing relationships' therefore abuse and violence remain hidden.

Sadie: we talked about boyfriends. I talked about my boyfriend and said always it was amazing. It was hard, I would just show that I had a good

boyfriend and I was really happy. I had to show how happy I was. If my mates were saying 'we are going through a bit of a rocky one at the moment', I would say things like how 'I really love him, and he wants me to move in with him'. But it wasn't what was happening at all. I would talk about him but inside I was crying thinking 'oh no'. I would never show it I would never come out with it.

Sarah: In case people didn't believe you or understand?

Sadie: yeah. I didn't Wanna look bad.

Sarah: Why would you look bad?

Sadie: Because I haven't got the perfect relationship that I'm saying.

In analysing Sadie's experience, the themes of responsibility and shame are evident. There is a lack of honesty with and trust in her friends to be able to understand and give the right response, so this leads to incongruence, stating that her relationship is 'amazing' when it is far from it. This is set against a backdrop of discussion of relationships but only the fairy tale 'happily ever after' of '*he wants me to move in with him*' even though this is in total contradiction; '*it wasn't what was happening at all. I would talk about him but inside I was crying.*' Drawing on a falsehood arguably contributed to the boundary maintenance of silencing voices that may challenge the status quo, so that a friend who may have shared '*we are going through a bit of a rocky one at the moment*' would have been shamed and silenced for her lack of ability to maintain her fairy tale romance. Sophie also maintains silence around her experience:

Sarah: and what about your friendships at school?

Sophie: I think it definitely made them stronger. My best friend from school is still my best friend now.

Sarah: ah, that's fab. So, when things were difficult, did you ever tell anyone, like your best friend or friends at school?

Sophie: well my friend lived really near me, so I had someone to turn to about my parents.

Sarah: so, what about when things were going on with your boyfriend did you tell your friends about that?

Sophie: no.

Sarah: so, you didn't talk to your friends about your boyfriend and his anger issues as you described it?

The friendship Sophie describes is very close and enduring, however, whilst she was happy to confide in her best friend about her parents and the

experience of domestic violence and abuse at home, she did not share her experiences of DVA with her boyfriend. I tried to explore these issues with Sophie, however, she would not be moved to share further, she seemed to be drawing from an internalised individualistic discourse of the neo liberal girl: all about improvement of the self through self-reflection and the 'decision' to 'be positive'. This arguably demonstrates personal agency and Sophie had shared earlier in the interview that she had been to a counsellor outside of school and had 'sorted herself out' and now just looked on the positive side and didn't and couldn't 'hold a grudge'. She spent her time reading about serious crimes and wanted to be a forensic psychiatrist and was planning to go to University and have a successful career. Although Sophie, like all the young women in my research had experienced DVA as a child/ young person. Sophie's description of her school friendships is in stark contrast to Sam's, however both are permeated by silence:

Sam: I literally had one friend at school, because I didn't want anybody else knowing what was going on. I couldn't have told it to anyone else, I didn't like anyone coming to my house, I didn't want them to know what it was like. I had to leave home early because it took 45 minutes to walk there. I had to be back no later than 3.30, so I literally had to march home I couldn't talk to my friends or go to the shop, just straight home, if I was a minute late, I would be in trouble.

Sarah: so, it was obviously too difficult to have friends, what did you do?

Sam: I would just be stuck in my bedroom, in my bed. Sometimes now I do that. Sometimes I don't know why I get up.

Again, Sam's experience is one of multiple abuses, and she remains isolated with her own relationship abuse whilst her and her mother were experiencing DVA in her home, she remembers '*I didn't like anyone coming to my house, I didn't want them to know what it was like*'. So, the secrecy and shame were compounded through her isolation, she states '*I literally had one friend, because I didn't want anybody else knowing what was going on. I couldn't have told it to anyone else*'. Sadly, this has endured and although Sam has shared her performances of agency, her adverse childhood experiences remain a current battle, as highlighted when she shares '*Sometimes I don't know why I get up*'. Not all young women can rely on friendships to support them through difficult times, even if the support reinforces misconceptions, it arguably has protective factors.

Experiences of DVA for a young person are isolating and frightening, and as I have presented through the voices of these young women, at times completely unfathomable and unspeakable. There is a distinct lack of discourse that supports in the naming of their experiences; through responsibility, minimisation, justification and excusing drawing on the fairy tale and dark romance discourses, silence is the most frequently used discursive tool. Young people are more likely to seek support from their peers, however, as the narratives we have been privileged to share demonstrate that peers also lack a discourse on which to draw information and knowledge to enable them to name, challenge and offer support.

Young women's views on the role of education:

Underpinning my research has been the curiosity to explore and examine the role of education, in both its broad and narrow sense, in the experiences and understandings of the young women in my research and the potential role that the young women envisage education could play. Katie initially shares why she thought DVA happened.

Katie: I think it's because we are not taught about it. Parents never speak about their relationship, friends don't really talk about the deeper bits of their relationships, and it's all kind of laughy and jokey. Sex ed is just like a laugh, you just don't take it seriously, I think more deeper thinking is needed.

Sarah: Ok, so how might you get that?

Katie: If people opened up more about it and spoke about it more, lessons in school, that's the first place you learn things isn't it.

Sarah: How do you think it is best to do that?

Katie: I think in smaller groups, not big groups, so you can talk about it.

Sarah: Do you think girls and boys should be in the same class for the lessons?

Katie: Boys are a bit more childish and laugh about things more and take it more as a joke, so I think it would be good if it was separate.

Katie very eloquently describes the reasons that she thinks DVA happens, which highlights the role of family and peers, the absence of discourse, the silencing of DVA and the lack of space in which to narrate alternatives. Katie's solution is: '*If people opened up more about it and spoke about it more, lessons in school*'; arguably these are ways of breaking the silence and challenging

discourse that hides and perpetuates DVA. Grace concurs that schools should be teaching lessons on healthy and unhealthy relationships:

Grace: In terms of what's right and wrong definitely. If they [schools] can, it doesn't have to be every day like maths and English, once a week, once a month, like you have an assembly or tutorial. If you had someone come in and give you the opportunity to talk about it, or to give you information on it, it is not like anyone else needs to know what you are going through, but just to help you understand. To leave leaflets with a number or website anything.

Sarah: so, are you saying anything would be better than nothing?

Grace: oh yes.

Grace states 'to help you understand'; this clearly pinpoints the need for education that supports young people's knowledge and understanding of relationships. There were differing views on schools being the best context for 'education':

Grace: I think it should be in schools, it is safe and easy. I think that you can get to so many people all at once I just don't know why they don't do. I think you could start at primary school and have basic lessons on what's right, for mummy and daddies to act like. Definitely secondary school, there would be so many people like me sat there, that if it was mentioned and taught. I definitely think that that is the place to start really.

Whether the young women experienced teaching and learning, not all of the young women felt that school was the best place for learning about relationships. Katie states that she did not have any lessons, and although she thought that it was a good idea to learn about it, she indicated that the 'only way' was to learn from family and friends, so a broader context of education, although she concedes school could be a place; summarising perfectly: 'it's about people talking more'.

Sarah: so, thinking about school, do you remember learning anything about relationships?

Katie: no. I think the only way you learn about relationships is by speaking to your friends or your parents.

Sarah: do you think it would be a good idea if people learnt what healthy relationships were, before they started getting into relationships?

Katie: yeah if I had learnt that I probably wouldn't have been with half the boys I have been with. I have never really had a good or healthy relationship. I would rather be single now.

Sarah: do you think young people can learn about relationships in school?

Katie: I guess it's about people talking more.

Like Katie, Grace believes that it's about talking and getting the message out there:

Sarah: So, from what you have said you think that schools should teach about relationships?

Grace: yes! It just needs to be got out there. What is healthy and what's not, and how it might make you feel, and it's not normal and it doesn't have to happen for the rest of your life!

Grace sums up the message perfectly, she is clearly in favour of relationship education and what needs to be covered. Ruby however sees the idea as scary:

Sarah: do you think we should be talking to young people in schools?

Ruby: yeah, but that would probably scare you a bit. But that's a good thing, if you are scared you will be wary. I suppose if you know about it...I am just trying to think specifically for myself as well, you know, certain things that I have not done, mistakes from before, I wouldn't do again because of the outcome. I can now see what could happen, you could end up dead.

Arguably Ruby sees talking to young people about relationships as scary because of her own experiences. However, although she thinks it may be scary she thinks this may lead to a wariness of the potential consequences as she says, 'I can now see what could happen, you could end up dead'.

Age and education:

Jessica and Sam both agree that school is an ideal context in which to deal with the issue of healthy and unhealthy relationships, but have divergent ideas about the ideal age:

Sarah: Are you saying year 10? (Jessica frowns) that a bit late then?

Jessica: yeah it was happening to me by then, kids are going into mature relationships by then and they have had that talk by then.

Sarah: Ok, so what age do you think would be good to do it?

Jessica: I don't know; there is a very thin line, of whether you are too young or too old. It is hard to say what age group. If you look at the media now, girls who are 14 looks like they are 20. I think

society expects girls to look much older than they are; they then get with older guys, and guys who know their ages. I don't know there's a fine line I think year 9 is the right age.

Jessica identifies many salient points regarding the best age and points out that 'there is a very thin line'. Jessica decides on year 9 as being appropriate and as a time when young people are entering romantic relationships. For Sam, this is too late:

Sarah: so, do you think it would be a good idea to have lessons on relationships in schools?

Sam: yes, I do. But I don't know how it would work; I don't know how you would explain it to kids. The younger age the better, then they have more chance of understanding that it is not right. So hopefully they have more chance to be able to stand up and say, "this isn't right". I think if something is going on, you try and keep it a secret, and it gets more difficult to talk about. I think lessons when you are in primary school and then in secondary school to remind you.

Jessica was unsure about the ideal age and was insightful in her assessment of the social impact of the media and the pressure on young women to look older than their age, and how this has a strong influence on their relationships. For Sam 'the younger age the better', so to start from primary school age, then into secondary 'So hopefully they have more chance to be able to stand up and say, 'this isn't right'. This has the potential to make the unspeakable speak able and the hidden, visible.

Naming domestic violence and abuse in education?

There is much debate in this field around the terms and definitions associated with DVA, which I covered in the introduction. I was curious to know if and when the young women had heard the terms domestic violence and abuse and if they identified their experience with the term, and their understanding and opinions on what terms could be employed in the educational context when talking about relationships:

Grace: I heard it at college, like I said with the women at college.

Sarah Did you think it applied to you and your situation?

Grace: Not really. At school, kids don't talk about things like it. Teachers don't talk about it, so it was only that I went to college one day a week whilst I was at school.

For Grace, the identification of the term DVA did not initially identify the simultaneous experience of abuse she was facing. As discussed, intergenerational abuse and the absence of accessible dialogues to counter abusive contexts creates a normalisation of abuse within 'loving' relationships. The perpetuation of silence surrounding abuse is then maintained through social structures such as in education, as Grace highlights: *'At school, kids don't talk about things like it. Teachers don't talk about it'*.

Ruby too had experienced DVA in her first family and in her own relationships:

Ruby: I had heard about violence because my dad was violent, but I don't know...

Sarah: do you think there is another term that young people might identify with, so they could understand what an abusive relationship is?

Ruby: it could feel like, you know when you hear people say how couples argue all the time and it feels like things get sugar coated all the time.

Sarah: ok, do you mean it makes it seem normal?

Ruby: yes. I think there needs to be, it's really difficult actually, showing how healthy relationships are.

Ruby could not remember when she had heard the term, but it did not appear to speak of her experience, although she identified with the understanding of having a violent father. Ruby describes the use of language to normalise unhealthy behaviours in relationships as she states: *'it feels like things get sugar coated all the time'*. This is an eloquent way of relating the 'sweet' veneer of acceptability on unhealthy or abusive behaviours within relationships. Sadie shares her view:

Sadie: I don't think it matters what you call it, just call it.

However, Sam has a different view on the importance of naming abuse:

Sam: I personally think we should call it domestic abuse and say that. Domestic Violence makes it just sound physical. Whereas, domestic abuse makes it sound like everything.

Sam's identifies the term 'domestic abuse' which reinforces the argument voiced by many survivors and activists, and as Sam highlights *'Domestic Violence makes it just sound physical'*. As I have discussed, the term domestic abuse, for some, encompasses a wider range of experiences that fall in to the

concept of abuse, and may help name, identify and therefore make sense of the senseless. As Sam points out '*domestic abuse makes it sound like everything*'. It is important that the range of experiences of abuse are named so that a wider understanding of the mechanism and experiences can be understood and incorporated into prevailing attitudes to dislocate its acceptability. However, Jessica is concerned that the terms should be more positive and age appropriate when discussing DVA in a school context:

Jessica: I think, if you bombard someone with too much they are just going to be overwhelmed and think it's all crap. Thinking 'what are they talking about'; I'm not in a violent relationship. I think with some age groups we can use those words and we know what they mean. But with children, girls especially that young, you can't...

Sarah: Ok, so what do you think you could use?

Jessica: I don't know. Healthy relationships I think, maybe functional and dysfunctional? I think if you are going to talk to children it has to be positive, you can't go in and be negative. There is no point saying don't do this, don't do that. It's like forbidden fruit then, some kids will think "ooh, what's that then" it may be exciting if I can't do it.

Sarah: OK, so are you saying that domestic violence is way too heavy?

Jessica: yeah overwhelming.

Sarah: what about talking to boys?

Jessica: well yes, they are usually considered perpetrators. They need to understand that you are not going in there telling them off because they're the guy and they are often the perpetrator. It's not every guy that will be a perpetrator.

Sarah: absolutely right.

Jessica: its individuals and they have a choice, if you have been shown that, you are going to think that's normal, you can't go in there saying 'men, we hate them'. You can't go in there and tar them with that brush. They might think I'm gonna do it anyway.

For Jessica the positive aspects of relationships should be the focus in discussing relationships in the school context, otherwise it may lead to shut down or be seen as '*forbidden fruit*'. This contradicts what many of the other women say regarding the need for the 'reality' of experiences such as rape. Jessica proposed a constructive rather than a deficit concept; a way to look at the positive aspects that characterise relationships and what that looks like in order to frame the negative, abusive, unwanted aspects: '*Healthy relationships I think, maybe functional and dysfunctional*'. The idea of presenting relationship

education as a healthy, positive concept and what that looks like before talking about the unhealthy aspects also appeals to Katie:

Katie: maybe talk more about healthy relationships; focus on the healthier side rather than the unhealthy violent side. Point out what's good in healthy relationships, point out what is and isn't okay. Not so much in-depth detail but so they know what a healthy relationship is.

Sarah: so, what a healthy relationship looks like?

Katie: and how to speak up for yourself as well, that helped me a lot learning that, how to communicate how you feel and how to like yourself. I think that's one of the worst things, parents are stuck in these relationships and their kids are there and they choose these relationships over their kids. I'm not the only one; I know lots of other people in that situation. No one really knows what it's like to be in that situation if you've never been in one. I think we need to tell people to open up about it more because people don't open up about it and it's okay to talk about it. But I know people want to be strong and think people are happy in their relationships.

The idea of identifying what a healthy relationship looks like is an excellent starting point for Katie and she draws on a feminist discourse of empowerment, sharing what had helped her *'to speak up for yourself as well, that helped me a lot learning that, how to communicate how you feel and how to like yourself'*. Sadly, Katie discursively constructs herself and 'other' women of 'choosing' their relationship over their children even though through the interview the intricacies and the unravelling of the complexities resisted and (re)scripted that discourse. Katie identifies a sense of shame as the woman responsible for the relationship, if you are not strong and projecting a happy romance shame creates a tension that maintains restricting gendered roles and responsibilities. However, the antidote for Katie is to break the silence of the shame of victim blaming; *'I think we need to tell people to open up about it more because people don't open up about it and it's okay to talk about it'*. This again supports young women's desire to talk about it; however, young people need the language and space in which to do so.

I explored with Sadie the possibility of education being able to rupture the notion that love, and abuse are an inevitable expressions of the other and to challenge the notion of 'normal':

Sarah: In the beginning you said you didn't know that it was abuse, and that you didn't really know fully because you loved him, so you thought it was all right. Do you think at the beginning of this happening, if someone

in a class, or assembly had told you 'this is not ok, this is not healthy, it is not love, do you think might you have thought differently?

Sadie: yeah I think so, if you were to point out the main things that you see in abusive relationships, that most likely that would happen to someone, if you mentioned the name calling, you didn't look nice today, some of the smaller things, or the main points that mostly happen; not the hitting, so automatically you might say 'oh that's happened to me. Yes, he's called me a Slag, yes, even if he just calls me a name once or twice that's still abusive it doesn't have to be hitting.

Sadie is clear in the need to name and call out abusive behaviour, '*the smaller things*', like name calling. It is not just name calling, but also not being called by one's name. So, a name that seems to be a pet affectionate name acts as a tool for objectification; to enable abuses to be more easily perpetrated, in Sadie's case 'baby girl' was a term of endearment, however, it was a signifier of a position and powerlessness. Sadie identifies the essential issue of definition and that DVA is not just about physical violence, the early warning signs may be name calling; '*even if he just calls me a name once or twice that's still abusive it doesn't have to be hitting*'. However, that said, gendered abusive name calling, through the guise of 'banter' in the school context has arguably normalised abuse and is woven through the 'boys will be boys' discourse that perpetuates and disguises abuse.

Sadie: Boys say it like it doesn't mean anything [slag], but they don't realise that it's really hurting someone, after all of this abuse with all of the boyfriend's I've had, and bullying. I've been through so much.

Sarah: You have been through so much; you're amazing; you're a survivor Sadie.

Pedagogy:

In addressing the theoretical and practical ways of teaching issues relating to relationships, healthy and unhealthy, the young women expressed their views on pedagogical concerns. Ruby drew on her own experiences and understanding to inform ways of educating others:

Ruby: I don't know because everyone is different, I think it would make a difference, like in schools. I watched the bill, and something happened where there were girls who had been kidnapped and they were bought to an abandoned place and then bad things would happen to them and I knew about that and what was going on and I identified with that after what happened to me. I can't remember whether I watched it before or after what happened to me. But that is when I thought that could have happened to me that's how it could have ended up, like that.

Sarah: ok, so do you mean that because you had experience of it, then the information helped you understand it?

Ruby: yeah, exactly, and that it's not normal.

Ruby suggests that should be a requirement to show what healthy relationships are and that this might make a difference in schools, for her a representation of her experience on the TV helped her to make sense of her experience of CSE; and that it should not be viewed as 'normal'. The idea of dramatizing young people's experiences also appeals to Sadie who suggests that it doesn't necessarily matter what you call it within education, but it is very important that it is presented to young people within the school context, which reinforces the arguments for what needs to be included in education:

Sadie: I think it's how it's presented. If you talk about it like you are in a conference it's just not going to get through people's minds, they will get bored. If people say look, all this happens you'd be sat there bored and you would be looking at your phone or not even listening. But if you had videos or performance and things maybe stuff that would shock you. You'd Wanna watch it, you want action, you want something to make you go, wow. You want something to make you open your eyes. I think people want real stuff, images, things that people have been through. Teenagers like seeing blue space... thinking that's really bad, if I don't stop it, that could happen to me, it makes you open your eyes. I think it will scare you a lot more rather than someone saying it's bad, rather than someone saying you can get hurt, you want to see a bruise see what can happen to you.

Sadie would like something that communicates in an impactful way; to avoid boredom. Thinking about Sadie's experience, it is totally understandable that a young woman in her situation would need a powerful antidote to breach her nightmarish experience. Sophie shares her views and ideas that are congruent with Sadie's:

Sophie: when you have just one lesson on something you can get bored. But I remember we had activity days and they do one every year, it was about diversity and you have it all day and have different people coming in doing different activities around the subject.

Sarah: so more concentrated information and activities around that so a day of different things around the subject?

Sophie: yeah, I think it would be a lot more memorable, like sex Ed was done one hour over six weeks but if it was done altogether it will be more memorable and it could be done in a more interesting way. The ideal would be to have a domestic violence day and then that would be more memorable.

Sarah: what about a play or film?

Sophie: I think the play definitely; or both something memorable.

The idea of something more memorable is illustrated by the concept of the school's activity day around diversity and Sophie sees merit in drawing a range of expert knowledge and activities to make the event stand out from the standard 'boring' lesson format. Sophie also feels that sex and relationship education is very much an 'add on'; something that a teacher does outside of their sphere of expertise and interest, which evidence suggests is how many teachers feel about it, placing its value and status very much secondary, rather than positioning it as important and far from making it 'memorable'.

Sadie: You know those adverts they are just not on point enough. If you put it on TV and I'd seen it, some of the stuff that he was doing to me would make me open my eyes and would have made me look, so if I saw anything that showed what was happening to me. I don't know, in a magazine, it would have opened my eyes. It might have started me re-tracking what he done; yes, that happened to me, yeah 'he did that'; it might start adding up and I would be thinking 'actually he's done a lot of those things'. Then you might start realising. So maybe you got an illness and you look online, and you look at the symptoms you think you got that got that all yeah, I've got that illness and I should get this checked out because I got all the symptoms it's exactly the same as abuse. If you look at it and think these are all the signs and you check out the signs that you've got and check out how bad it was and if you are to those who think there have got part of it. But if you thought got to those then yeah, you're starting to think I need to look at more stuff.

Sarah: So, information and education?

Sadie: Yeah, if you watch something on TV like embarrassing bodies you'd say 'yeah you've got the symptoms'. The visual looking at it and then somebody is explaining it. Anything, if you saw a video of abuse it would be exactly the same, you'd be thinking 'yeah I've got that; it's the same as me actually'. You would look at it in the same way, you might want to get help after that so you wouldn't leave it...It's hard, people just don't realise how serious it is, until somebody dies. ...When will people think this is a bad position for people to be in?

It is ironic that Sadie states 'when will people think this is a bad position for people to be in' as throughout her interview I was asking myself the same question in trying to make sense of it. There are so many contradictions to be negotiated in the sense making of DVA, and Sadie's excellent advice is still punctuated with paradoxes, when she states, 'don't be too scared to tell someone like your family'. It is surely difficult, as Sadie's story demonstrates to not be 'too scared' when you are exactly that; 'too scared'. However, Sadie

sees that by not disclosing and voicing her experience and therefore not seeking help may have been a mistake *'if I told my mum, and seen someone sooner, if I'd got help sooner, I wouldn't be in the position I'm in now'*. However, this is with hindsight. As I have argued throughout, the lack of available discourse to draw on with which to support making sense of one's experience of DVA fails to give voice to the experience and hinders help seeking. Sadie gives evidence to support this suggesting that if it were 'on TV', or in magazines it would be a valuable tool for sense making.

What is an Expert?

Who is best placed to educate? Sadie was very clear in her view of teachers and who is best placed to educate on matters relating to healthy and unhealthy relationships:

Sadie: Like maybe if they had people who been through it or seen it if we could discuss it with somebody who had been through it; just to talk about it, and people who work with it who see it and whoever knows anything about it who can say 'this happens to everyone and this is how it happen', and tell them the places you can go and get support. If a teacher says it, you just look at the teacher and think what you know about it you're just a teacher you ain't got nothing in common with this kind of subject and you just won't believe them. But if it's somebody who's been through it or someone who sees it happening you would start to think actually that's something, I can relate to someone I can trust because they'd seen it and they've been through it so I know that they're telling me the truth and I could trust them.

Sadie is very keen to have spoken to an 'expert', someone who understood the situation, and had either experienced DVA, as a victim/ survivor or as a practitioner. She is very dismissive of teachers and their ability to understand, when she states *'you ain't got nothing in common with this kind of subject'*. This comes directly from her experiences of her teachers as described above, which fostered an immense lack of trust. Sadie clearly does not feel any sense of faith in teachers and through her words demonstrates the importance of the need for trust when dealing with experiences such as hers, when the situation she was in may have been literally life and death, as she states, *'someone I can trust'* and reiterates: *'I could trust them'*.

Sophie shares her views on teachers:

Sophie: I think it's because you have to see them again in another subject or see them round school doing something else. I don't know. I

think you just get the impression it's just in that lesson they've been told to tell you that and it is not what they want to tell you.

Sarah: do you mean they are not exactly an expert on the subject, they're seen as just a teacher?

Sophie: yeah that's it. If you've got a science teacher, they teach science and are interested in science and they've then been told to teach you sex education and a tutorial that's not what they wanted to do when they trained to be a science teacher.

Sarah: don't you think of sex Ed being about the body and science?

Sophie: Of course, but they don't want to do that bit about relationships.

In both Sadie and Sophie's narrative they position the teacher as awkward or inept in relation to teaching relationship education. They discursively construct the teacher as being ignorant of the subject and Sophie suggests it's not what they want to do or would have signed up for. This creates a clear level of cynicism. It is interesting that the research suggests that teachers do indeed find it difficult to teach in this area, with many stating that they do not feel equipped to deal with such matters. Sadie recommends that the voice of a victim/ survivor: '*somebody who's been through it*' or *someone who sees it happening*'. Sadie identifies truth and trust as pivotal. Other forms of support also mentioned.

Sadie: At first, I would have been a bit edgy with it, I wouldn't want to tell them, but maybe after a while I might have actually, like if they got to know what's happening with me. If I thought about it, to realise about it, if you know that some people die from this, some people are murdered. If you think someone's calling you a slag you might think it's something small. But if you know that some people die from this kind of thing. From being called a slag to being dead, that happen so easily, it can change that quickly, and they need to think about it now. Not when you're about to die, when you're in the middle of a situation of things they could kill you. I think it would have made me think a bit more of 'God, maybe I should get out of this, it's serious', I don't know what it could have been like. At this point in life he could have killed me, right now, he was very abusive, he carried knives, he carried guns, at one point I could have said the wrong thing at the wrong time. I could be in hospital, or I could be dead.

In reflecting upon her understandings of her experiences Sadie is aware that she may initially have felt 'a bit edgy' in relation to talking to someone about it. She is also aware of the magnitude of her situation and the possibility of it being a serious threat to her life, making a connection between the earlier 'name calling', which throughout the interview she expressed her anger and hurt by

being called a 'slag' mainly when expressed by boys and young men. Although it may seem like a chasm, she encapsulates the underpinning of DVA with her statement: *'From being called a slag to being dead, that happens so easily'*. As previous experiences suggest, this is no quantum leap... *'he carried knives he carried guns, at one point I could have said the wrong thing at the wrong time, I could be in hospital or I could be dead'*. The leap is arguably in Sadie's own understandings of DVA from her retrospective standpoint.

Advice for others:

The young women are experts of their own experience, and this has given them a unique position from which to share their experiences and their views on the role that education could play in other young people's experiences. This is not to suggest that they are experts on other young people's lives "perhaps it remains that they are simply experts on their own lives" (Renold, 2011: 428). Therefore, I do not suggest either that their views are generalizable or transferable, but they do provide an in-depth perspective with which to deepen and broaden our understandings that support the body of research in this vital area. All of the young women wanted to take part in the research, partly so they were heard, and their experience validated, but also in hoping that it might make a difference to someone else:

Sarah: You're a star, so if you had one piece of advice to give somebody in the same position, what would you say to them?

Sadie: Oh so much to say, you would just want to tell them...don't ever think that you're in the wrong because you're never in the wrong, don't be too scared to tell someone like your family because if you're too scared it makes it worse because if you're scared you're never gonna get through it, you can stay scared for the rest of your life and that's the mistake I made. If I told my mum and seen someone sooner if I'd got help sooner, I wouldn't be in the position I'm in now.

After the contradictions and complexities presented throughout the data, Katie's advice is simple.

Katie: Just to leave them.

Although Sadie has much to share, for Katie it's clear and straight forward, *'Just to leave them'*: although simultaneously nebulous and complex. As the narratives of their own experience demonstrated in the last chapter, this is no

mean feat. It is working out how to bridge the gap between viewing relationships as love, or as abusive. Once on the other side it appears obvious and simple, however, the discourse of love obscures the view of the bridge. Grace shares her advice:

Grace: now, I would say definitely talk to a teacher or something, but because now as, I suppose, an adult, I know how many people have been through it. Everyone I talk to knows someone who has been through something like this, so the chances are a teacher might understand, and might care, and might want you to talk to someone that they know that you can talk to. Like I say, when I was in that situation no one mentioned it, I didn't think anyone did know about it so I thought just kept quiet, but if I could talk to my 14-year-old self I would say I did the right thing by talking to the people at college.

The advice that Grace would offer to her fourteen year old self demonstrates the hidden, secretive nature of abuse, '*when I was in that situation no one mentioned it, I didn't think anyone did know about it so I thought just keep quiet*', even in plain sight of her parents abusive relationship, Grace's normalised conceptualisation of relationships distorted her perception of acceptability, and the silent nature of experiences continued this concealment. However, in identifying unhealthy relationships and through verbalising the experience may provide access to support that Grace now identifies as the best way forward, as she states; '*now, I would say definitely talk to a teacher or something, but because now as, I suppose, an adult, I know how many people have been through it.*'. In asserting that: '*the chances are a teacher might understand, and might care, and might want you to talk to someone that they know that you can talk to*' opens up possibilities and interrupts the silence. However, when the silence is broken within the milieu of gendered dominant peer discourses there is the risk, as we have seen, of reinforcing and normalising, thereby providing a context in which unhealthy relationships are supported and can flourish. It is worth bearing in mind that this is in some ways an idealised retrospective view, however, it is still informative in understanding the experiences and how Grace understood and made sense of it, with the possibility of changing it.

In inviting responses from others for advice or ideas, a variety of things were thrown up that were addressed to a variety of recipients. Ruby's advice is drawn from her own experiences and is specifically directed at the role of teachers, addressing key points for supporting young women in vulnerable situation:

Ruby: My advice is for teachers. I think that what they could do, obviously the majority of the group is normal. But they should keep track of that one person who is missing school, you can just tell with students and they should be just kept an eye on and involve them more in the group. If they have to, they will do it. Keeping them involved, that way they are not going to keep going back.

Sarah: to involve young people more in class?

Ruby: Yes, otherwise they get attention for all the wrong reasons. I think that it's partly teachers. I didn't have that support; they treated me like I was doing something wrong.

Sarah: so, instead of taking care of you?

Ruby: I was wanting to go home, so they would punish me when I went back, detentions and things like that. Then I felt like I was being picked on, I was told like "don't wear that jumper, wear this blazer, if I don't take my earrings out...Obviously there was something not right. There was something different about me, because I was different. But they weren't taking that into consideration, they were just taking the thing I wasn't wearing the right thing, and not noticing that I needed someone to sit down and talk to. To give me some advice, to be able to sit in this next lesson, and to do to something rather than running away all the time, but no one was helping me, they were just telling me off.

Ruby's advice was directed at teachers and how at school she felt at best unsupported, and at worst punished and picked on. Ruby draws on a discourse of shame, constructing herself as an outsider, seeing herself as not 'normal' and that '*obviously the majority of the group is normal...there was something different about me, because I was different*'. Embodying the secrecy and shame of her experiences she is clear in the expression of her need to be supported and understood '*I needed someone to sit down and talk to; to give me some advice*'. This highlights the role that education has in safeguarding and the importance of an approach that is knowledgeable about adverse childhood experiences, DVA in particular, and how young people need to be supported emotionally in order for them to be able to apply themselves academically. Even though I ask Sam's if she has any advice for someone in her shoes, she addresses her advice to an institutional receiver:

Sarah: Do you have any advice for someone who may have been in the same position as you at school?

Sam: I honestly have no idea. I would want to say to the school and the authorities that they let me down, so I don't know. There is nothing that I can say, I didn't get nothing.

Sam has no idea on any advice, other than to address the school and the 'authorities' as Sam felt so let down by them. From being animated and angry, she appeared to be beaten at this point.

Grace makes a case for education:

Whilst at school Grace was able to access a unique pilot scheme offered at the local college where she attended as part of a 'day release scheme' for vocational training once a week. The course was designed as a young woman's recovery programme. Although Grace was unaware how she ended up on this course, this does suggest that the education system had some awareness of Graces' situation:

Grace: like at college she gave me the opportunity to [talk about her experiences], they were giving us an hour in the morning to teach us about abuse and what abuse people go through and I just remember that every week they would say if anybody wants to talk to us afterwards then you can. But I just thought nah... I didn't talk about it. But I think one week I cried after what they'd been talking about and I had to walk away from the situation as there was an alarm bell in my head. So, she wanted to talk to me on my own, so she gave me the opportunity. So, if there was someone like that, in school or you just had lessons like one hour a week or in tutorials so you can talk about what goes on at home or out of school. At least if you had that option; or if you knew that there was somebody who could listen or might understand if you had that option. Then maybe talking to people, I don't know if I would have done any better at school, I'm not sure but I definitely wouldn't have felt so alone and so angry and obviously mum left and therefore I was only left with dad who was very angry and even worse when mum left, because mum left. It was very lonely, and I didn't really have anyone to talk to.

So, Grace had to deal with the loss of her mother fleeing from the DVA and she was left with her father, who was angry at the best of times, but 'even worse when mum left'. Luckily Grace was in the position of accessing support, however, this was only open to her as she went to college, it was not available at school, but Grace is very clear that it should have been available to her at school. She also makes a link between having support for her experience and academic achievement or at the very least, support for her mental health: 'maybe talking to people, I don't know if I would have done any better at school, I'm not sure, but I definitely wouldn't have felt so alone and so angry'. Having negotiated her way through these experiences at school Grace shares her vision:

Grace: I would say, if you were taught when you were growing up that if someone was hitting you and controlling you, and talking to you in certain ways, and threatening you, it isn't normal, even if you think it's like love, and there were people that you shouldn't be in a relationship with. Then maybe, I would have grown up knowing that they are horrible and not everyone is like that. Maybe that; I have learnt so much now, I do know signs and I know what they're like, why they do things and stuff. But growing up, I was so clueless; I really didn't have a clue. If people had taught me what people are like, I would have known more about it and I might not have gone through those things.

Grace's view of education is simple and arguably effective; to know that '*hitting you and controlling you, threatening you, it isn't normal, even if you think it's like love, and they were people that you shouldn't be in a relationship with.*' However, Grace grew up in a family experiencing DVA; therefore, it was 'normal'. Although she states, '*growing up, I was so clueless*'; this demonstrates for me a lack of alternatives for Grace to draw on except her 'normal'. An alternative perspective could come from education, as Grace's comment encapsulates: '*If people had taught me what people are like*', this may have provided the language for Grace to understand and challenge her experience of 'normal'; '*and I might not have gone through those things*', and to narrate a new nontoxic version of love.

In this chapter I have examined the experiences of the young women whilst in education and their views on what, if any, education could play in such experiences. Arguably there are many young people currently in education that will be experiencing DVA within a family context, and some as young as thirteen will be experiencing this in their own relationships. The intergenerational link of DVA may, as the data bears out, position many young people experiencing simultaneous experiences. The stories shared establish that young people are suffering extreme levels of violence and abuse and feel totally unsupported by both the formal and informal educational context; this maintains a sense of shame, isolation and fear. Having examined the literature in relation to education, a complex and contradictory picture emerges; simultaneously a conducive context for gender violence and abuse to develop and flourish and as a space for freedom, knowledge and an environment in which to challenge and disrupt dominant gendered discourses. These inconsistencies are supported by my data.

There is enormous pressure to be in relationships as part of the performance of 'doing' gender. However, young people are not being supported in society and more specifically in education, to comprehend how to navigate such potentially treacherous terrain. The young women's experiences of SRE echo that of previous research demonstrating its failures in addressing SRE that concur with the 'patchy and inconsistent' findings of the provision for DVA relationship specific education. This is leaving young people in vulnerable and dangerous situations. The ability to concentrate and focus on their academic studies was mixed and Grace sums it up in stating '*it [academic achievement] was the least of my worries*'. This ability was impacted by their family home as well as their own relationship. For some, education and academic achievement was used as a supportive context and an escape from the rest of their lives. However, stories of fear for their safety or that of their mothers exacerbated the inability to focus. The impact on their academic achievements is therefore understandably varied, although none of the young women reported accomplishing what they would have liked. This ranged from missing out on predicted A*'s, to 'cocking it up'. This educational narrative of failure arguably feeds in to the already fragile sense of self of a young woman experiencing DVA, and constructs her as a 'bad girl', intensifying the sense of shame. Again, this draws from the victim blaming discourse and, frames her as having a 'choice' of 'relationship' and her lack of 'trying' as the root of the problem, rather than the double experience of abuse and the understandable reaction to a lack of support for trauma within the context of education and the expectant path for a young woman.

Informal education and support from one's peers play a massive role in the context of education and relationships. Evidence suggests that young people are more likely to confide in their peers rather than adults about their experiences of DVA (Barter et al, 2009, Barter et al 2015, Allnock, 2015). However, informal learning through peer culture has the ability to reify knowledge that compounds heteronormative gendered notions and dominant relationship discourses. Katie points out 'I think you learn a lot from your friends'. However, quite what friends have to teach is perhaps another matter when Ruby shares 'it was more like Jeremy Kyle (laughs)', in talking to her friends about relationship issues, thereby emphasising the limitations of the role of peers. Evidence suggests that peers can provide a protective role in abusive

relationships; they can also play a huge part in the education of SRE and the prevention of DVA. Prevention work can be embedded in the school context so that everyone is 'on the same' page; challenging gendered beliefs, victim blaming, perpetrator excusing and providing an environment where misogyny and violence will not be tolerated.

The young women all support the role of education in addressing healthy and unhealthy relationships echoing the broader voices of young people, who feel that education is failing them in providing skills, information and support to navigate the complex world of romantic relationships. Although there were a range of views, from their experience the role of the SRE teacher was questioned; they positioned teachers as awkward or inept. Therefore, it should be delivered by an 'expert' or someone with 'expert knowledge', this was raised as important a number of times and resonates with evidence by Stanley et al (2015). Research has also suggested that teachers themselves do not feel equipped to teach in this area of SRE. In terms of pedagogy there was a consensus in making teaching it memorable, relevant and real. Again, this strongly resounds with Stanley et al in highlighting 'authenticity' in prevention education and making it 'real'. Although there were differences of opinion on the 'how to' educate young people in relation to age, teachers and pedagogy, they all very much supported school-based education as the vehicle by which to do this.

Underpinning my research has been the curiosity to explore and examine a gap in research that examines the role of education, in both its broad and narrow sense, in the experiences and understandings of the young women having experienced DVA in their own relationships whilst in education and the potential role that the young women envisage education could play. Arguably the role of family, peers, the absence of alternative discourses of gender and love, the silencing of DVA and the lack of space for challenge allow DVA to flourish. Katie's solution is: '*that if people opened up more about it and spoke about it more, lessons in school*'; arguably this would all help to make difference. The young women are experts of their own knowledge, and this has given them a unique position from which to share their experiences understandings and their views on the role that education could play in other young people's experiences. I do not suggest that their views are generalizable or transferable, but the data

provides evidence from the perspective of young women who have experienced domestic violence and abuse in their relationships whilst at school and this can both deepen and broaden our understandings in this crucial area. It seems evident that with hindsight it is easier to make connections and have an understanding of experiences, although possibly this is difficult when there is a lack of discursive tools with which to construct them. Arguably therefore, even a nod to a version of 'edutopia', a whole school approach that provides all school staff with training and an understanding of empathy for this complex pandemic, supported by 'expert' practitioners in a space for educated foresight and alternative discourses to rescript love; rejecting the simultaneity of love and abuse, then a difference could be made.

Chapter ten: Conclusions

I began my thesis curious about young women's lived experience of domestic violence and abuse and the role of education in this experience. In this concluding chapter I present my key findings and how they address and fulfil the objectives that I set out for the exploration. I present my research aims and demonstrate how I have addressed them throughout the thesis; and my unique contribution to knowledge. I move on to point out the limitation of my research and the implications for policy and practice, before I end with my autobiographical reflections and postscript.

There has been an absence of UK based feminist research that has examined relationship abuse from a young woman's viewpoint (Chung, 2005); nonetheless, this is a dynamic field of research characterised by rapid change, so the evidence base is burgeoning, however, this has mainly focused on quantitative research investigating the prevalence, impact and risk of these experiences. I wanted to address the gaps by considering the situated understanding of the young women across contexts and the part that formal and informal education played; and in addition, the young women's views on education's potential role in addressing DVA.

In exploring young women's experiences in their own relationships and the role of education, I positioned myself working within a feminist post-structural framework; a fruitful alignment yet underutilised in theorising DVA, leaving it largely 'underdeveloped' (Wendt and Zannettino, 2015). Given the enduring nature of gender violence I felt it appropriate to draw on a range of theories to further develop this fertile yet challenging theoretical alignment in order to make sense of the complexities of DVA.

Activism and theorising emerging from second wave feminists reified the phenomena of DVA, and the term, patriarchy was utilised to demonstrate the systematic disadvantaging of women; it 'captured the pervasiveness and interconnectedness of different aspects of women's subordination' (Walby: 1990: 2); it privileges men and subordinates and oppresses women, with control being a crucial mechanism. Patriarchy and violence are interlinked; positioning male power and entitlement as the key to domestic violence. Arguably

patriarchy is a pivotal concept that is demonstrated throughout the data. The young women in my research were positioned in a subordinate position with gender and sexuality hierarchically organised, so that the young women were responsible for the maintenance of the relationship and care of the 'fragile' perpetrator, and this also include being responsible for the violence and abuse.

Feminists have argued that male violence is at the heart of men's control and that the patriarchal structures of the state play a part in supporting and perpetuating (Hanmer & Saunders, 1984) male violence. The young women's stories relating to the specific state intervention of removing a child their care highlights that a 'failure to protect' is the state impugning a mother for the violence and abuse perpetrated by another. The data from the young women's experiences supports what is known about mothers per se in this context; they do their best to protect their children and make choices that keep them and their children safe, even if that means 'choosing' to stay with the perpetrator. The state is also implicated by its lack of support for women who are victims of domestic violence, with DeKeseredy, (2011) suggesting that the ideology of patriarchy offers the 'political and social rationale for its own existence'. Consequently; "both men and women come to believe that it is natural and right that women be in inferior positions which explains domestic violence." (Wendt and Zannettino, 2015: 20).

However, feminisms theoretical impasse and arguably the neo liberal uptake of core tenets of equality have led to a fragmentation of theory, and there has been little impact on the incidence and impact of DVA, and as Winstok (2011) argues; domestic violence is the only gauge of equality necessary in society, as she argues:

"violence against women at home demonstrates the problem of gender inequality and discrimination at its utmost severity and makes redundant the need to establish and demonstrate the problem in other social contexts." (p.306)

The individualistic discourse that constructs women as having rights and choices, arguably disguises the enactment of agency and the constraints of choice in situations of DVA. Young women are positioned as having possibilities over their experience, however, when the experience of abuse is hidden by a veneer of love it is only after the relationship has ended that the façade is

removed and an understanding of the experience as abuse is understood as such, revealing the distortions of 'choice'.

Poststructural insight relating to gender, sexuality, power, agency and discourse allow a broader view with which to examine the insidious nature of male domination, power and violence. Poststructural understandings allow for a nuanced view of the way power constructs discourse and through language; what one can be, and what can be known. The young women's stories elucidate the complexity and power of dominant discourse to construct ones gendered and sexual identity; love and romantic relationships, and how difficult it is to resist, reject or rupture these confining dominant discourses in order to make sense of DVA. This is crucial I would argue in understanding the ongoing perpetuation of violence.

The underpinning aims of my research were:

1. To explore young people's experiences of domestic violence and abuse in their own relationships.
2. To appreciate how young people construct, understand and make sense of these experiences.
3. To examine how these subject positions have been formed and negotiated by family, peers, cultural and educational contexts.
4. To scrutinise the role of education in these experiences.
5. To explore young people's views and ideas on the role that education could play in relation to domestic violence and abuse.

I address my first aim through chapters five, six, seven, eight and chapter nine by narratively exploring the young women's experiences of domestic violence and abuse. In chapter five I introduced my participants through situating them and their emergent narratives in relation to what is known about the 'risk' factors for experiencing DVA. Although as I stated I had not asked for this specific information it became evident that there were substantial risk factors. Gender, age, age gap, pregnancy, family and peer violence arguably impacted on the

young women's vulnerability to experiencing DVA, although the intersecting factors provided an intricate picture it made it problematic to isolate each aspect which poses a problem in respect of prevention.

In chapter six I explored the range of violent and abusive experiences within their own teen relationships and examined them within the definitional framework employed by cross governmental bodies. A preponderance of their accounts related to emotional abuse and coercive control, however, these were underpinned and reinforced by physical and sexual violence. The stories of violence and abuse reported by my participants support the evidence (Safelives, 2017; Barter et al 2009) of alarmingly high levels of severity for this younger age group. Financial abuse played a smaller part in their experiences, as one might expect due to economic inactivity however, it played a bigger part than anticipated in this age group. Arguably, although their experiences fall within the cross governmental definition, it does not relate to age. So, although the reduction in age to sixteen was much welcomed, I would contend that it is crucially failing those most vulnerable and at risk. This arguably perpetuates the invisibility and inability to identify DVA in this group.

In chapter eight the data encompasses evidence of their abusive experiences concerning their reproductive rights, pregnancy and motherhood, and the analysis highlights the gendered nature of abuse and confining nature of discourse and what it means to be a pregnant young woman or mother. The narratives highlight that the young women were not passive victims but were agentic actors who demonstrated their resistance and used the power they had; both to protect themselves and their children and find ways to resist their mistreatment (Semaan et al, 2013; Radford & Hester, 2006).

These experiences are framed within the school setting and this establishes that young people are suffering extreme levels of violence and abuse, unsupported by both the formal and informal educational context. This maintains a sense of shame, isolation and fear. My data supports the inconsistencies of the role of education, simultaneously a conducive context for gender violence and abuse to develop and flourish and as a space for freedom, knowledge, and as a protective environment in which to challenge and disrupt dominant gendered heteronormative discourses. There appeared to be

enormous pressure to be in relationships as part of the performance of 'doing' gender. However, these young women were not supported to comprehend how to navigate such treacherous terrain; with their experiences of SRE demonstrating its failure, leaving them vulnerable in dangerous situations.

Chapters seven and eight both address my second aim and provide an analysis of how young women made sense of their experiences. The prevailing cultural discourses and supporting narratives relating to gender and love dominated young women's understanding of their experiences. Conceptions of romantic love permeate public discourse and are performed through the lens of the heterosexual matrix, a social construct that shapes and organises our world through our language and is informed and reinforced by gendered constructions that are saturated by popular culture. Arguably the dominant discourses frustrated their ability to articulate their experiences and the capacity to construct their stories. However, the young women were agentic in their attempts to reject and resist, and I was struck by the way the young women constructed their stories peppered with feminist thought. However, this appeared to be hampered by the lack of discursive tools to rupture the commanding position of dominant notions of romantic love. Therefore, their understandings were complex, inconsistent and contradictory as they attempted to negotiate these discursive obstructions.

Through analysing the young women's narratives one can see the complex negotiation of the confining discourses of romantic love and the limitations of any alternative with which to make sense of such incoherence. In asking 'What's love got to do with it' (Donovan and Hester, 2015) in relation to DVA and sexuality, the answer appears to be... 'everything'. Popular culture and dominant discourses distort love and hide DVA. The gendered lens of romantic love is visible in the hierarchical positioning of masculinity, which these young women, equated with love, care and protection, a 'prince' to save her from adversity or 'knight in shining armour' to protect her from life's perils. This is a gross distortion. Love was positioned to conquer all; even the bad lad was thought to be tamed by love. Through the data analysis the enactment of masculinity by aggressive actions towards the young women appeared to underpin rigid beliefs about women, gender and their role within a romantic relationship, and the violence and abuse reinforced the gender boundary,

thereby maintaining a particular system of gendered patterns and performances.

This had substantial consequences for the young women's understandings of their relationships which arguably promoted gender inequality and prioritised hegemonic masculinity, tolerating and excusing violent and abusive behaviours. Their understandings were further restricted in relation to pregnancy and motherhood, where the intersectional factors further discursively enmeshed the young women, overriding their attempts to reject or counter discourses that additionally impeded articulation and their understanding. The assembly of 'mother' is fundamentally entwined in gendered discourses; powerful and pervasive; constructing mothers as the ultimate expression of the female role and like gender motherhood, and the practice of mothering, are rendered invisible by their entrenched interweaving in the social and cultural fabric of our society. Although it can be argued that there are multiple constructions and performances of motherhood there is a duality in popular discourse, the 'good mother' and the 'bad mother'. The intersectionality of gender, age, disadvantage and abuse compounds and further limits the ability with which to position one's self as a young mother in an abusive context, it confines the capacity to perform an accepted version of 'good mother' and instead some of the young mothers discursively constructed themselves as 'very bad mother'. The young mothers who had their children removed from their care understandably struggled to resist the construction of them as 'bad mother', for one young woman it was totally accepted. For another, she tried to find ways to construct herself as 'good mother' but this was arguably nuanced and fragile and was not maintained and I would argue that this was the result of the binary nature of mother that dominates, and in her case was reinforced by state institutions. My data supports Carabine, (2007) and Wood and Barter (2014) who argue that young people, although I would argue more specifically, young women, may be blamed 'for their failure to take opportunities offered to them'; and the "failure to make the 'right' decisions" (Carabine, 2007; p. 964). Wood and Barter (2014) highlight that this may be done; "without an examination of the wider factors which may inhibit their decision-making capacities" (p. 565). Arguably the binary 'right' and 'wrong' does not fit the complex and nuanced experiences of the young women in my research.

I propose that in problematising and unravelling these constructs with a greater understanding of the context of violence and abuse, evidence of young women's agency in resisting, rejecting and attempting to rupture can be found. As the data highlights, young mothers who are abused by their partners are not just passive victims but are agentic actors who demonstrate their resistance and use the power they have; both to protect themselves and their children and find ways to resist their mistreatment (Semaan et al, 2013; Radford & Hester, 2006). However, young women do not have the power to stop the violence and abuse and they do not have any power to make a choice between their child and their partner, even if it may be presented that way. The responsibility and self-blame that permeates through the data enabled the mother/ victim blaming discourses to be reconstructed and reinforced, making mothering in this context extremely challenging. They were very positive about their mothering and their abilities in this role, albeit these were being successively undermined by their partners and 'the system' that draws from, maintains and supports the same discourses that construct mothers in the circumstance of DVA.

The findings from my data and analysis in chapter five address question three of my aims; clearly demonstrating the impact of the young women's first family and peers. All the young women in my research experienced DVA in their first family and through their narratives identified the interconnection of this experience. Their peers and their peer culture were influential in compounding the heteronormative gendered notions and dominant relationship discourses available. Their silence was overriding, just as it is in adult women's experiences. The young women who disclosed to their friends were not believed and were subsequently left with feelings of confusion, guilt, shame and loneliness. Ruby's story reflected the problematics of misinformation and the reinforcement of relationship narratives, suggesting that when she spoke to her friends, 'it was more like Jeremy Kyle', thus emphasising the limitations of the role of peers. The data supports the notion that young people are more likely to turn to their peers, however, it questions findings that suggests that peer relationships play a protective role, rather the evidence suggests they played a role in stultifying attempts to counter any resistance. The data presented undoubtedly identifies the supremacy of the role of family and peers in the role of domestic violence and abuse, providing confirmation of the impact in the

normalisation and acceptance of dominant discourse of love, and questions where and how prevention and early intervention is best placed. There is an argument, considering the data presented within my thesis, that it is better placed within institutions such as education rather than the family so that the cycle may be broken; this can then permeate peer cultures and their subsequent familial relationships.

Chapter nine addresses points four and five of my aims by scrutinising the role and potential role of education in the young women's experiences of DVA. All the young women were at school when they experienced DVA, and in some cases pregnancy/ motherhood and they reported that there was little in the way of education, prevention, intervention or support either formally or informally. The young women's narratives relating to their sex and relationship education echo that of previous research demonstrating the limitations and failures of RSE provision and they concur with the 'patchy and inconsistent' (Bell and Stanley, 2006) findings for the delivery of education to specifically address DVA. This left the young women in vulnerable and dangerous situations. The ability to concentrate and focus on their academic studies was mixed and Grace sums it up in stating '*it [academic achievement] was the least of my worries*'. This ability was impacted by their family home as well as their own relationship. For some, education and academic achievement was used as a supportive context and an escape from the rest of their lives. However, stories of fear for their safety or that of their mothers exacerbated the inability to focus. The impact on their academic achievements is therefore understandably varied, although none of the young women reported accomplishing what they would have liked; this ranged from missing out on predicted A*'s, to 'cocking it up'. This educational narrative of failure arguably feeds in to the already fragile sense of self of a young woman experiencing DVA, and constructs her as a 'bad girl', intensifying the sense of shame. Again, drawing from the victim blaming discourse that frames her as having a 'choice' of 'relationship' and her lack of 'trying' as the root of the problem. The impact of her experience of abuse and the understandable reaction to a lack of support for trauma within the context of education understandably impacts on the expectant educational trajectory for a young woman.

There was little or no room within which to rupture the dominant discourse on which they drew for relationships and love, no space, no formal or informal support and a lack of tools to support any understanding of their experiences. All the young women believed that education has a vital part to play in addressing and redressing the current situation. Although arguably the family is an institution of learning; to educate and challenge in this context is not always a viable option as the young women's stories demonstrate.

The evidence provided by the young women's voices support the proposition that schools are the ideal place for education to address healthy and unhealthy relationships. This echoed broader voices of young people in qualitative research who feel that education is failing to provide skills, information and support to navigate the complex world of romantic relationships. The data here provides an in-depth rationale for this position, although there were a range of views, from their experience the role of the SRE teacher was questioned; they positioned teachers as awkward or inept. Therefore, it should be delivered by an 'expert' or someone with 'expert knowledge', this was raised as important several times and resonates with research by Stanley et al (2015). Research has suggested that teachers do not feel equipped to teach in this area of RSE. In relation to pedagogy there was a consensus in making teaching memorable, relevant and real. Again, this strongly resonates with Stanley et al in highlighting 'authenticity' in prevention education and making it 'real'. Although there were differences of opinion on the 'how to' educate young people in relation to age, teachers and pedagogy, they all very much supported school-based education as the vehicle by which to do this.

The young women are experts of their own knowledge, and this has given them a unique position from which to share their experiences, understandings and their views on the role that education could play in other young people's experiences. I do not suggest that their views are generalizable or transferable, but the data provides evidence from the perspective of young women who have experienced domestic violence and abuse in their relationships whilst at school and this can both deepen and broaden our understandings in this crucial area. It seems evident that with hindsight it is easier to make connections and understand experiences, although this is difficult when there is a lack of discursive tools with which to construct them.

Young women in this study recounted narratives about their relationships that were reflective of dominant discourses of love, imbued with fairy tales and Disney. They described their relationships as true love, drawing on and making sense of DVA through supporting gender narratives, demonstrating their persistence and dominance. They found numerous ways to understand their experiences within the dominant discourse of love and were agentic, rejecting notions of victimhood. However, with limited discursive tools to construct the self and to understand their experience the young women found it difficult to resist, reject or rupture highlighting the 'normality' and acceptability of DVA as a part of romantic love.

Their narratives of pregnancy and motherhood were also fragile in their ability to reject the 'bad mother' construction; reflecting the central discourse of teenage pregnancy creating young mothers in DVA contexts as problematic and as 'bad' mothers. My research highlights the importance of prioritising young women's experiences of DVA and challenging dominant and supporting discourses that constrain and marginalise. As the stories identify education is simultaneously a conducive context for gender violence and abuse to develop and flourish and as a space for freedom, knowledge and an environment in which to challenge and disrupt dominant gendered discourses. These inconsistencies are supported by my data; however, these young women's narratives and their views clearly underpin the need and desire for education, even a glimpse of 'edutopia' with a space for educated foresight and alternative discourses, rejecting the simultaneity of love and abuse could make a difference.

My contribution to knowledge:

My contribution to knowledge is empirical, theoretical and methodological. Empirically my contribution is in examining young women's experiences of domestic violence and abuse in their own relationships, across contexts and in the in-depth analysis of their understandings of these experiences. Reproductive autonomy, pregnancy and motherhood were found to be key themes in the data that were bound up in the complexities of gender, love and abuse. Theoretically it is in the analysis of their intertwining experiences across

these contexts by employing feminist Poststructural insights to young women's experiences of DVA and in addressing the confining nature of dominant gendered heteronormative discourses and underpinning narratives. My research adopted a feminist narrative approach to interviewing in order to allow the young women participating in the research to give voice to their experiences of violence and abuse in the context of their education, and for them to reimagine the role education would play. This allowed an in-depth exploration of their stories and views to address the preponderance of quantitative research methodology in this field.

The limitations...

It should be borne in mind that there are of course limitations to the research and as I have stated one aspect is that it is not generalizable, however this was not a goal due to the methodology chosen. Access to my participants was sought through specialist services; on the one hand this was a purposeful methodological choice to maintain a feminist ethics of care, so that the young women had had an opportunity to work with services to keep them safe and to support their recovery; however this will have given them time to reflect and increased their knowledge and understanding of their abuse and this may have impacted their narratives, interspersed with feminist theory that may have come from the feminist narrative of the support work undertaken. Ethically this is not an issue; however, this may have acted as an intervention that other participants drawn from an alternative population may not have experienced. Arguably this would have impacted their ability to articulate their experience and resist and reject discourse further, or it may have provided different alternatives. Due to some of the young women being involved with social care, there was a sense that some of the stories were limited by their need to mitigate against any potential threat of a 'failure to protect'.

There is an issue with the retrospective approach required in research on DVA, as the thesis has highlighted. Being able to understand and articulate that a relationship is abusive is part of the problem, as Chung (2005) noted, young women may only define their relationship as abusive once it has ended. Woodiwiss (2014) argued that when one narrative becomes dominant there is a

risk in creating misunderstandings that silences those who do not recognise their own lives within it. Arguably it is only with the renewed perspective that it is possible to see abuse through the wide lens. Although I would argue that this adds weight to the need to rupture discourse to make abuse visible, so that it can be articulated.

The young women's re-imaginings of education are arguably imagined within the confines of the education system that they know and have experienced, therefore a more creative process of 'imagining' may allow the emergence of alternative ways of 'doing education', as evidenced by Renold's (2017, 2018) research.

The one area that I have alluded to but not discussed fully is that of social networks and the impact of the internet. Although this presented itself within the data and reference was made to Facebook, I felt that the limited nature of the data would not add to the more advanced debates that have ensued since the collection of my data, especially in reference to the large-scale European STIR research project.

The crucial limitation of this work is the focus on young women. DVA is as I have stated gendered, and therefore a focus of evidence on femininities is only half the picture. Further research is needed to address this.

Implications for policy and practice:

Research in this field matters: DVA has a huge deleterious impact on those who experience it, resulting in the murder of two women on average a week, with the cost and impact reverberating throughout all of society. This has serious consequences on people's life experience, health and social problems across the lifespan and on life expectancy; recognised as one of the nine adverse childhood experiences. DVA may incorporate other ACE's that fall into the categories of physical, sexual and emotional abuse as emphasised through my data.

My research highlights that age played a dominant part in these young women's experiences of DVA, this was made more complex by pregnancy and motherhood, and as Wood and Barter (2014) point out, it is unhelpful to view

‘teenage mothers separately from their adult counterparts’ when they have shared experiences. They state:

“Teenage motherhood is an uncomfortable concept as it transcends the child–adult dichotomy. While theories that are child focussed are important to appreciate children's agency and the ability of the teenage mothers to resist their social confines, we must not forget the common experiences some of these children will share with adults.” Wood and Barter (2014:565).

Through my data, the experiences they share of DVA with adult women and with mothers highlight the necessity to review age in relation to these aspects of young women’s lived experiences, to enable supportive discourses with which to rupture the current toxic ones, that enable silence and arguably perpetuate abuse.

My data highlights young people’s desire and need for education, formally, both in a broad and a narrow sense to impact on informal education. Schools need to address the gendered heteronormative conditions of education and address the environment that make schools to be a ‘conducive context’ for gender violence and provide high quality relevant relationship and sex education. Specific education also needs to address DVA and promote a safe space to challenge and support in a creative way; allowing new discourses to emerge that challenge the current toxic ones available. Gender and love may then be performed in a way that fails to hide abuse.

Through the narratives shared all institutions need to address their understandings of DVA! Institutions are I would argue, condoning and supporting discourses that enable DVA to flourish. Young mothers who have experienced a range of adverse childhood experiences, including DVA are being held to account for other people’s actions. Young women chose love, not abuse and this needs to be recognised, this is perpetuated through ‘the failure to protect’ narrative. Arguably all professionals should have current knowledge on DVA and how this impacts their profession and their role, being able to recognise, support and signpost.

From the young women’s experiences and understandings of the role of education although as I have said, they are not ‘experts’ except of their own experiences, however, their stories provide evidence that highlights both the

lack of support and provision but also the role they feel education could have played in their experiences and importantly for policy and practice the role it can play; why and how. I wanted to offer more than a suggestion that this may have implications for education. I am saying through the voices I have heard that it does have implications that need to be acted upon. The contradictions presented in the narratives provide an insight and evidence of resistance and rather than a defeat, this can be regarded as progress; in occupying this space creatively there is movement to breach the gap that exists between dominant and alternative discourses, I agree with Angela Davis who states: 'I'm a feminist so I believe in inhabiting contradictions. I believe in making contradictions productive'.

In education there may be guidance and policies in place, however, the Women and Equalities Committee on Sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools identified through their enquiry that there are limitations and provides evidence that these are not working. As discussed in the literature review, evidence for the 'whole school approach' (Maxwell et al 2010) identified an overarching approach to promote gender equality and challenge violence against women and girls. Their recommendations stated:

"training for staff, training up peer mentors to challenge sexual bullying, reviewing or writing new policy documents, integrating more work on gender and violence within the curriculum, and engaging parents more fully in this area of work." (2010: 17)

Legislation is needed to safeguard an undertaking that sexual harassment and sexual violence become a priority for all schools. There have been some moves in the right direction, however the most recent implementation of RSE as compulsory has moved from 2019 to 2020, and a consultation on the draft statutory guidance on relationships education, relationships and sex education, and health education has just been announced. This has the potential to make a difference, but I would caution that unless this includes working to establish new discourses of gender and love and to reject ones that excuse abuse this will not rupture the prevailing poisonous discourses that have a powerful and insidious grip on the ability to construct an alternative and will not make the difference that is urgently required. There is scope for further work on the contradictions that may emerge from research with young men, as I believe this is the missing part of the puzzle. Dominant discourses confine young men to;

however, it is after all young men who are perpetrators of DVA. To (re)imagine and (re)conceptualise we will need to galvanise support. As Wood states: “[f]amilies, schools, and the workplace must confer persuasive power on new narratives and diminish the acceptability of toxic ones.” (2001: 259). Schools and RSE need to problematise and (re)conceptualise ‘love’, as Wood points out “[narratives] are remade continuously as individuals and institutions decide that existing ones are inadequate to define and direct our lives”. (Wood, 2001: 259). Love has become a catechism that once tactically deployed solidifies heteronormative performances that support entanglement in the Disney fairy-tale or the dark romance discourse where any level of abuse can be perpetrated in the concealment of love. The ability to recognise abuse is dependent on the ability to ‘find alternative discourses to those traditionally associated with romantic love. (Hayes, 2014: 56).

Autobiographical reflection:

I have, through my bumpy research journey, gained a greater understanding of the nature of research and life, as messy, chaotic and contradictory. I have learned, for example, that things do not go to ‘plan’ or fit neatly into categories, like the self, they can be multiple and inconsistent, spilling over and making a frustrating jumble. But research is also immeasurably rewarding.

I have so many times wanted to stop this research journey, trying to juggle work, part time study and a grieving family has left me little time or energy for me to develop a new way of being, or to rebuild relationships that were shattered by my becoming a widow and single mother. I have had to fulfil so many conflicting roles that I have felt that I am not doing any of them well enough. This journey spans my ‘old’ life and the ‘new’; one that I have tried so hard to create and (re)create. A young woman that I was working with on a DVA recovery programme recently told me of her experience of researching for a PhD and argued; “you don’t have to be clever to do a PhD you just need steely determination”. So true, I hope I have it. All the times I thought, ‘that’s it’ but it felt like an injustice to the young women who had shared their stories with me. I could not possibly put the powerful stories and amazing voices of these young women, graciously and trustingly shared, even though partial, incomplete and momentary, in a drawer, the stories, like the young women themselves deserve so much more; I hope I have done them justice. It is hard not to feel angry about

this seemingly enduring problem, but we do what we can in a way that we can and hold on to the hope that we can make a difference, even if it was just in the process of the young women being, and feeling heard.

Postscript:

Throughout my research journey I was able to make contacts with a vast array of people and organisations. Through these connections I shared my knowledge and findings from the research process. The impact of my research beyond academia has to this point been notable for its 'effect on, change or benefit' to 'services', 'health', and 'quality of life'; in two areas relating to the prevention of and recovery from DVA.

The first is that of Pattern Changing, a recovery programme provided by a DVA specialist charity, the programme is based on the book by Shear Goodman & Fallon, (1984) for women who have experienced DVA. Through my work I was able to utilise my knowledge and skills to advocate working with younger women and to update and develop the course (now somewhat dated) to include a critique of dominant discourses of love and to facilitate women in exploring and developing their core beliefs around gender, love and motherhood. In the last three years I have worked with over three hundred women on pattern changing and their feedback demonstrated the significant impact of the course and the challenge to the gendered aspects of love and DVA. I have received personal thanks from several social workers who attributed the work undertaken on the course as instrumental in women regaining their parental responsibility.

The second area of impact has been through the fruitful connection made with Tender Arts and Education. Tender is an arts charity working with young people to prevent domestic violence and abuse, and sexual violence by promoting healthy relationships based on equality and respect. Through my research I discovered Tender and the impact their prevention projects were having. I contacted the CEO, Susie McDonald and stated my intention of finding a way to secure projects to be delivered in the South West. Although this took a few years to achieve Tender were able to secure funding for the project, supported by local funding, and in partnership the project has been delivered in the South West for two years to approximately two thousand school staff and pupils.

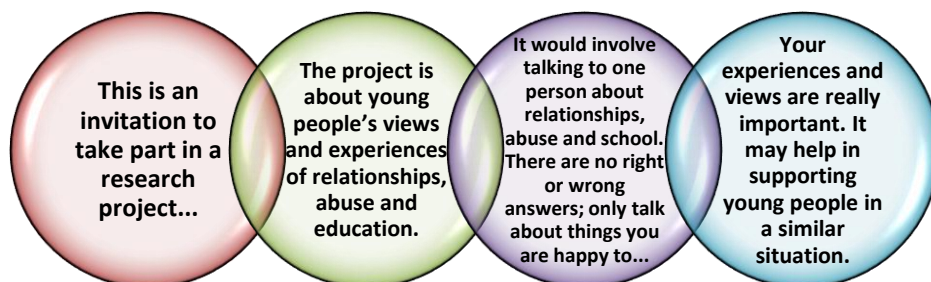
My research background in this area has been instrumental in informing and advising schools of the need for prevention work and the benefits in delivering the project in their schools. The project provides a glimpse of edutopia; working with one class of students for two days with the aim of helping students develop skills for building healthy and respectful relationships. The main aims of the project are: to educate young people about violence and abuse perpetrated in relationships; to expose attitudes that condone and conceal domestic and sexual violence and to enable young people to seek support and access services if they, or someone they know, is experiencing abuse. This is achieved through open, creative workshops that explore the healthy and unhealthy aspects of relationships, empowering students to consider their own attitudes and behaviour in an age appropriate way. Young people can “rehearse” situations in order to observe the consequences of their choice of action. They can “step into the shoes” of other characters and so develop empathy and understanding for how it feels to be someone else. The culmination of the project is a performance, where students can share their knowledge to their peers. The project also includes a one-hour Staff INSET session enabling them to become more confident around the issue of relationship violence and to be able to effectively promote the safeguarding of their students. The feedback on the project both nationally and regionally is consistently outstanding and in my experience, schools want to secure the project for follow up work or build on the work undertaken. However, there are significant funding issues.

Nevertheless, there is current funding in the South West for the next three years so the project can potentially reach around four thousand young people and teachers. The project is also being offered to primary schools, specialist school’s such as pupil referral units, F.E colleges and Universities. The primary work is a precursor to the secondary schools work and takes a broader view of ‘relationships’ helping to: identify what makes healthy and unhealthy friendships and relationships; identify safe and unsafe touch, understand the NSPCC Underwear Rule; recognise their rights as children and developing human beings; explore expectations around gender and equality; recognise the effects of bullying, develop empathy and to offer appropriate support to their peers and seek support if they need it. This work is crucial in supporting young people to have happy healthy relationships.

As part of each project substantial data is collected in the form of pre and post intervention questionnaires enabling a significant body of information to be gathered as to the efficacy, impact and enjoyment of the project and including specific questions regarding young people's experiences of DVA (except in the primary project), so that knowledge is situated both regionally and nationally. Each project is completed by the compiling of a personalised impact report for the setting detailing the results.

I am committed and engaged in this work and would very much like to continue researching in this area with a broader focus to include masculinity; as I have argued throughout the thesis it is a focus on men/boys and masculinity that is fundamental to making the change to DVA. The data and discussion collected throughout my PhD work has had a dynamic effect on both my understanding of young people's experience and my practice. Equally, my ongoing professional experience and practice has had a great effect on my understanding of the data. This project has highlighted the individual women's circumstances and beliefs about gender, love and motherhood in a personal, moving, and shocking way. I continue to engage with the dynamic between academic theory and practical and policy requirements in my working life.

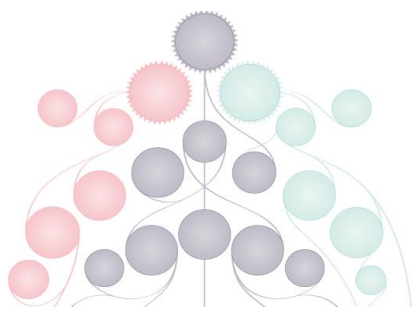
An Invitation.....



A Thank You £20 Voucher...iTunes, New Look, River Island...

If you would be happy to take part or would like to ask questions; call, text, email.

Sarah: 07973816359/ sec227@exeter.ac.uk



Exploring young people's views of: Relationships... Abuse... and Education...

An ESRC Funded Research Project conducted by
Sarah Cole from The University of Exeter.

Some Information about the Research...

What is the research about?

There is very little research about young people, abusive relationships and the role of education, so my research project seeks to explore young people's views of teenage relationship culture, abuse and education. I would like to find out young people's views on dating, how relationships may be managed by young people, how friendships affect relationships, how young people deal with break-ups and also what young people think about violence and abuse in relationships. My main aim is to understand the role of education in this process, for example, does/ did your school or teachers address some of these relationship issues in their lessons, and if they do/ did what you think about it. If they don't/ didn't, do you think they should?

Why am I doing this research?

My name is Sarah Cole and I am undertaking PhD research at the University of Exeter in the Graduate School of Education, and when the research is complete it will be written up as my PhD project. I may also use the information to present to people in universities and in the future to publish some of the research in journals or books. This is a very important and interesting topic and by understanding your views better and answering some of these questions, it is hoped that this research will be able to shape the teaching of these issues in the future and to support young people's relationships.

How will it work?

It will involve talking to young people who may or may not have experienced domestic violence or abuse. It will 20-60 minutes, on their own or in a group, whatever is preferred by the young person.

Confidentiality and anonymity.

If you decide to take part, you do not have to give me any information that you are not happy to share. You can tell me as little or as much as you choose. Everything you tell me will be confidential, I will not tell anyone, your friends, teachers or parents what you have said without your permission. I will only break this confidence if I feel that what you have told me puts you or others at risk. The information you share will be stored in a safe place so that no one else can have access to it. In order to help keep what you say anonymous this means that you will be asked if you want to choose a pseudonym (a different name to your own) to appear in the research reports. This would mean that people wouldn't be able to identify your comments if you didn't want them too. If you decide to take part and then change your mind you can withdraw from the project at any time, without giving a reason, and none of your information will be used.

Contact Details: If you have any further questions please email me: Sarah Cole sec227@exeter.ac.uk 07973816230

Appendix 3

Interview Questions Schedule:

Questions on their experience:

I know that you have been through a really difficult time... can you tell me a bit about it? (prompt: when/ where/ how often/ did you tell anyone/ what happened in the end/ how do you feel now?)

Can you remember when you thought that what was happening in your relationship was not ok?

When did you first hear the term 'domestic violence/ abuse'? What do you think is the best name for it?

Did you think that it was talking about the things that you have experienced, or your situation?

Questions on school:

Can you tell me what it was like at school when things were happening at home/ in your relationship?

How did you feel about going to school at that time?

Did it change the way things were at school? (Prompt: concentration, grades, achievement and friendships?)

Peer relations:

Did you tell anyone at school? Friends/ teachers/ counsellor? (Why? Why not?).

Would you like to have told someone? (Why / why not?)

Do you talk to friends about relationships?

Do you think anyone/ other could have helped you? What would you have liked them to say/ do?

If you had one piece of advice to give to someone in the same position you were in, what would it be?

What do you think can be done to stop it happening?

Section on: Role of wider media:

Do you have any views on how TV or magazines deal with these issues? (Do you think they are helpful/ not helpful?).

How does it work with things like Facebook, or other social network sites?

Section on school or curriculum:

Did you have any lessons on Domestic violence? (In Citizenship/ PSHE, SRE/ RSE lessons, or tutor time?).

What were they like? Do you think it helped? How could it have been better?

Do you think it would be a good idea to have lessons about it?

What do you think about calling what happened 'domestic violence'? Do you think it should be called something else? Why do you/ don't you like that term? What would you call it? What do people call it?

HOW do you view relationships and domestic violence and abuse now?

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